

Language on the Move: Bilingualism and Local Identity in South Sulawesi Truck Expressions

Ikhwan M Said¹, Asriani Abbas¹, Tammasse Tammasse¹, Hasan Hasan¹, Zuhriah Zuhriah¹,
Yassir Arafat Usman¹, & Risman Iye²

¹ Universitas Hasanuddin, Makassar. Indonesia

² Universitas Iqra Buru, Maluku. Indonesia

ikhwan.said@unhas.ac.id

ARTICLE HISTORY

Received : 2023-05-09

Revised : 2024-12-27

Accepted : 2025-04-12

KEYWORDS

Bilingualism

Language Variation

Linguistic Landscape

Local Language Identity

Truck Inscriptions

ABSTRACT

This study addresses a notable gap in linguistic landscape research by focusing on the language variations displayed on trucks in South Sulawesi, a mobile medium of public text that has received limited scholarly attention. The research data was obtained through observation and documentation of trucks in several areas in South Sulawesi. It was found that there are 21 data which consists of Indonesian, local languages, and foreign languages. The collected data then qualitatively analyzed using content analysis techniques. The data obtained from observation and interviews were processed and thematically analyzed to explore patterns of language and cultural usage on trucks in South Sulawesi. The findings reveal that language choices align closely with socio-economic environments, where Indonesian is predominantly used in urban areas, local languages are more common in rural settings, and bilingual expressions often appear in suburban zones. These inscriptions are not only functional but also serve as markers of identity, cultural pride, and modern sensibilities, especially among younger drivers influenced by global media and popular culture. This research contributes to the broader discourse on linguistic landscapes by introducing the concept of vehicular language as a dynamic site of cultural negotiation. The insights gained have implications for sociolinguistic studies, cultural identity research, and creative industries seeking to understand how language, space, and mobility interact within Indonesia's complex linguistic ecosystem.

1. Introduction

Language in public transportation plays a significant role in disseminating information and showcasing the linguistic identity of the community. The use of language in these settings is a crucial aspect of linguistic landscape studies, as it reflects how language is utilized within public spaces, highlighting the social and cultural dynamics of the local community. Kallen (2023) explains that linguistic landscape research aims to explore how language is used in public spaces and how such usage both reflects and shapes community identity. In this context, the language displayed in public transportation offers a meaningful lens through which we can understand the intersection of language, culture, and everyday life. By examining linguistic choices in these settings, researchers can uncover how language functions not only as a tool for communication but also as a symbol of cultural values and collective identity.

Public transportation serves as a concrete example where language visibly interacts with and influences the social fabric of a community, providing a platform for the articulation and celebration of linguistic diversity. The use of local languages alongside the national language in signage, announcements, or visual expressions within transportation systems not only aids communication but also reinforces a community's ongoing efforts to preserve its linguistic heritage while simultaneously engaging with the broader norms of national society (Beeh, et al., 2022). This duality emphasizes the cultural significance of local languages, positioning them as symbols of community identity and cohesion (Tartaglia & Rossi, 2015).

Furthermore, the inclusion of minority languages in public transport settings empowers marginalized communities, affirming their cultural identity and fostering a deeper sense of belonging (Nguyen, & Hamid, 2018). Public transportation, therefore,

functions as a microcosm of societal interactions, where language choices mirror social dynamics and contribute to the shared cultural narratives of the community (Hu, 2014).

The Sulawesi community, like many around the world, is characterized by a rich linguistic identity, with a variety of languages and dialects. Language in public transportation not only serves to facilitate communication but also acts as a significant reflection of the community's cultural and linguistic identity. This phenomenon is especially evident in South Sulawesi, where local languages such as Bugis, Makassarese, and Luwunese are frequently featured in public transport settings, showcasing the region's diverse cultural heritage. As highlighted by Yulianti et al. (2022), the integration of local languages into public spaces is essential for cultural adaptation and the preservation of community identity. Public transportation in South Sulawesi, therefore, becomes a platform for expressing local languages, which reinforces community pride and a sense of cultural uniqueness. For instance, the use of the Bugis language in public transport does not merely facilitate communication but also serves as a marker of cultural identity, fostering belonging among community members. This aligns with Yulianti et al.'s findings on the importance of language in cultural adaptation and identity transformation (Yulianti et al., 2022).

Trucks, a critical mode of transportation in the Sulawesi community, are extensively used to transport goods between locations (Itaristanti, 2012). They play a crucial role in the daily lives of the community, serving not just as vehicles but as vital economic drivers in the Sulawesi region. As (Iye, R. et al. 2023) notes, trucks are often seen as symbols of progress and mobility, directly tied to economic advancement. Given their importance, a significant number of trucks can be found traversing the Sulawesi region, and the inscriptions on these vehicles present an intriguing linguistic phenomenon that warrants further exploration. When public spaces, such as trucks seen by many people, display various languages and scripts, they communicate a message of inclusivity and respect for linguistic diversity. This is particularly important in culturally rich regions like South Sulawesi, where local languages are central to community identity (Hu, 2023). Trucks in South Sulawesi, therefore, serve as more than just vehicles for transport; they also function as unique forms of visual communication. They convey messages through a combination of words, images, and colors, making them powerful mediums for cultural expression. These visual elements reinforce the role of public signage in showcasing cultural diversity and community values (Hong, 2020).

Research on truck language provides valuable insight into how language operates within specific social and cultural settings, offering a deeper understanding of Sulawesi's linguistic diversity. The

inscriptions and visuals on these vehicles reflect rich cultural and social dimensions, especially through their distinctive designs and vibrant decorations. Trucks in South Sulawesi are often embellished with colorful ornaments, messages, and images that enhance their cultural resonance. These creative expressions contribute to the linguistic landscape, showing how language evolves and adapts across different contexts. Unlike formal communication seen on signs, billboards, or official documents, the language on trucks embraces colloquial speech, regional dialects, and culturally embedded references, setting it apart as a unique form of public discourse. As (Tartaglia, S., & Rossi, M. 2015) observe, the use of local languages in public spaces, including transportation, serves as a visual representation of cultural identity, fostering a connection with one's heritage and reinforcing a sense of belonging. The presence of these languages on trucks acts as a window into the local culture and environment of South Sulawesi, reflecting the region's linguistic diversity. This finding aligns with Hasyim's (2024) study, which highlights how colloquial expressions and dialects in truck inscriptions reflect the evolving nature of language shaped by cultural contexts. These inscriptions offer observers a glimpse into the region's linguistic diversity and the coexistence of multiple languages, underscoring the influential role of language in shaping Sulawesi's linguistic landscape.

Research on the Linguistic Landscape (LL) in transportation modes has been conducted extensively, with studies such as Gorter's (2013) work on the linguistic landscape of bus stop signage. This research sheds light on the complex interplay of linguistic and visual elements in public spaces, offering insights into how public communication and identity are constructed. Similarly, Beeh et al. (2022) explored the linguistic landscape of transportation in Kupang, revealing how language styles and linguistic combinations contribute to regional cultural identity. Kamengko et al. (2022) examined the language used on bemo vehicles in Kupang, demonstrating how multilingual signs contribute to the landscape's diversity. Another study by (Nishijima, Y. 2022) explored the stylistic analysis of car stickers within the linguistic landscape, revealing how these stickers play a significant role in Japan's motorized society as symbols of self-expression, affiliation, and communication. Putra, I. (2023) and Sarniwati et al. (2022) emphasize that language in public spaces, including personal domains like vehicles, is crucial to understanding the linguistic landscape. This broader view echoes Kurniawati (2023) and Kamraju (2023), who emphasize that expressive language forms like stickers enrich the linguistic landscape by revealing personal beliefs, affiliations, and cultural practices.

Although previous studies have explored various aspects of linguistic landscapes, they have not specifically examined how words and images on

public transportation relate to the socio-economic and geographical contexts of communities. This study introduces a novel approach by focusing on truck inscriptions in Sulawesi, investigating their connections to economic conditions and the surrounding physical environment. It reveals how language functions not only as a tool for communication but also as a reflection of community identity, economic activity, and social interaction. Rather than merely identifying language forms or frequencies, this research highlights the dynamic interplay among linguistic expression, geographical setting, cultural context, and economic development. This integrated perspective offers a deeper understanding of the complex factors shaping identity and progress in Sulawesi.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Linguistic Landscape

Linguistic Landscape (LL) refers to how language appears in public spaces through visual, auditory, and symbolic forms that reflect the identity of a region (Mulyawan & Erawawati, 2019). Several theoretical perspectives underpin this field. Cognitive linguistics suggests that language in the environment reflects how people perceive the world. Sociolinguistics explains how language use in space shapes social identity. Linguistic anthropology highlights how language and symbols express cultural values (Sapir, 1924). Cultural geography examines how linguistic signs construct meaning within spaces (Florenta & Rahmawati, 2021), and social linguistics explores how language in public contexts shapes interactions and identities (Mulyawan, 2020).

Further, Artawa (2024), frames LL as the study of language shaped by geographical, historical, and social contexts. Nash (2019) points to the role of environmental features such as terrain and vegetation. Mooney & Evans (2023) emphasize language mapping and spatial research, while Haspelmath (2005) links spatial distribution of language to its phonological and semantic characteristics. Most LL studies focus on static signage in urban settings. This research fills a significant gap by exploring truck inscriptions in South Sulawesi as mobile and informal forms of linguistic expression. These inscriptions represent dynamic forms of identity and cultural meaning that move through space. By focusing on vehicular texts, this study introduces an innovative perspective to LL research and provides insights into how mobile language practices contribute to cultural representation and community identity in real-world settings.

2.2 Language Variation

Language variation theory explains that linguistic differences across communities follow patterns shaped by social structures such as class, geography, and culture (Prihandini & Isnendes, 2020). Fishman

and Chambers, as cited in the same source, highlight the interactive relationship between language use and social variables. Truck inscriptions reflect these patterns through creative spellings, abbreviations, and localized expressions. Such language forms emerge from the interaction between social norms and geographical context. Unlike the formal signage commonly studied in LL, these moving texts offer insight into how language evolves informally and adapts across different environments.

This study introduces truck inscriptions as a source of spontaneous language variation, expanding the scope of LL research. The findings show how informal written expressions reflect regional identity and community values. These mobile texts serve as everyday linguistic artifacts that preserve local variation and demonstrate how language is influenced by mobility, space, and social interaction.

2.3 Language and Cultural Identity

Language plays a central role in expressing and preserving cultural identity. Santoso (2017) explains that linguistic choices reflect a person's regional, religious, and social background. Hasan (2019) adds that language is essential for transmitting cultural heritage and maintaining group cohesion. In this study, truck inscriptions represent linguistic expressions that reflect regional pride and collective identity. The use of local dialects and hybrid language forms turns these vehicles into symbols of cultural communication. The texts often convey humor, advice, or moral values rooted in South Sulawesi's local traditions.

By focusing on these mobile inscriptions, the research reveals how cultural identity is both expressed and reinforced in public spaces. This contributes to the broader discussion of cultural sustainability, highlighting how everyday linguistic practices support heritage preservation. These findings also show that informal texts carry cultural weight and help maintain the continuity of community identity in multilingual contexts.

2.4 The Use of Local Languages

The use of local languages in public domains is vital for maintaining linguistic diversity and cultural identity. Vesya (2022) observe that regional languages continue to be used in daily and ceremonial contexts. On trucks, these languages serve to express local pride and reinforce cultural belonging.

In this study, truck inscriptions often feature a blend of local dialects and Indonesian. This bilingual approach allows for both cultural authenticity and wider comprehensibility. While these language choices promote inclusivity, they may also lead to communication challenges among speakers from different backgrounds. The research finds that local languages are more frequently used in rural areas, while urban inscriptions tend to favor bilingual forms.

This spatial variation reflects the influence of location, audience, and communicative purpose. By exploring these dynamics, the study emphasizes the value of local language use in everyday settings. The findings highlight how mobile language forms contribute to both linguistic resilience and cultural visibility, offering meaningful insights for language preservation and sociolinguistic studies in multicultural societies.

3. Method

3.1 Research Design

This research utilizes a qualitative approach with a descriptive method (Mahsun, 2012). A qualitative descriptive method is ideal for examining the linguistic and visual landscape of trucks in South Sulawesi, as it allows for a detailed understanding of how language use and decorations reflect cultural identity, social interactions, and economic practices within the region.

3.2 Research Location

The study was conducted in South Sulawesi, focusing on the main roads that connect Makassar City, Gowa, Maros, and Takalar. These locations were chosen because they represent central hubs for the trucking industry in South Sulawesi, providing a diverse range of trucks with varying linguistic and visual elements. Data collection took place in January 2023 to capture the contemporary linguistic and cultural dynamics in the region.

3.3 Research Participants

The participants included a diverse group of individuals associated with the trucking industry. Specifically, some truck drivers were interviewed to understand their motivations for choosing specific decorations and language on their vehicles, as well as the perceived impacts of these choices on their work and social interactions. Additionally, ornament designers were engaged to explore the creative processes and cultural influences behind truck decorations.

3.4 Data Collection Techniques

The data were collected using two primary techniques: observation and semi-structured interviews.

- 1) Observation: Observations focused on trucks traveling along the main roads connecting the study locations. Trucks were purposively sampled based on their visually striking elements, such as vibrant colors, unique patterns, and prominent language usage. The observations aimed to document the linguistic forms (monolingual, bilingual, multilingual) and visual elements (stickers, logos, patterns) on these trucks. Visual data, in the form of photographs, were captured to

document these features, and field notes were taken to provide additional contextual details.

- 2) Semi-Structured Interviews: Interviews were conducted with truck drivers and ornament designers. The truck drivers provided insights into their language and decoration choices and how these reflect their cultural and professional identities. Ornament designers elaborated on the artistic and cultural considerations behind their work.

3.5 Data Analysis

The collected data were analyzed qualitatively through content analysis and thematic analysis (Bungin, 2017). Content analysis was used to systematically classify linguistic and visual elements observed on trucks. Linguistic forms were categorized based on their usage, whether monolingual, such as local languages or Indonesian, bilingual combinations like local-Indonesian or Indonesian-English, or multilingual displays. The visual elements, including stickers, patterns, logos, and custom artwork, were grouped and examined for recurring motifs and stylistic trends. This analysis identified patterns in language use and visual design, such as the prevalence of local languages in rural areas and the dominance of Indonesian and English in urban contexts.

Thematic analysis further expanded on these classifications by exploring deeper meanings and connections within the data. Interview transcripts and observational notes were analyzed to uncover themes such as the cultural significance of language and decorations in expressing identity and heritage. The analysis also highlighted the dynamic interaction between globalization and localization, where English reflects modernity and global connectivity, while local languages emphasize cultural identity and community pride. Another significant theme was the economic implications of linguistic and visual choices, particularly how they influence local businesses, tourism, and perceptions of community identity.

4. Result

Based on field research, language diversity among trucks in South Sulawesi includes the use of various languages, such as Indonesian, local dialects, English, and combinations of English-Indonesian and Local-Indonesian languages. As a result of these discoveries, the data table has been divided into two categories: monolingual and bilingual language data. There are twenty-one data of the writings found on the back of trucks in the main road of Makassar City, Gowa, Maros, and Takalar. It was found that the writings located behind trucks in South Sulawesi generally use Indonesian as a monolingual language. However, if the trucks originate from rural areas passing through Gowa, Maros, and Takalar towards Makassar City, the use of local languages as monolingual is more dominant.

The ornaments and decorations used are also more intricate and artistic. The data also found that there are trucks that use English as a second language or

bilingual. The use of English on trucks in South Sulawesi is usually to present a modern or international identity in branding.

Table 1. Distribution of the Written Form on the Back of the Trucks

No	Writings behind Trucks	Design/Ornaments	Total
1	Indonesian	Sticker, pattern, logos	10
2	Local language	Sticker custom artwork, pattern	6
3	Bilingual (Indonesian+English)	patterns and logos	3
4	Bilingual (Local+Indonesian)	Sticker, pattern, logos	2

According to the data collected from the field, a total of 21 trucks were observed with writings, ornaments, and decorations while passing through the main road in the regions of Makassar City, Gowa, Maros, and Takalar. Among these instances, Indonesian language writings take the lead with a count of 10, followed by 6 instances of local languages, and 3 and 2 instances of bilingual writings, respectively. The observed designs and ornaments encompass a variety of elements such as stickers, custom artwork, patterns, and logos, with patterns and stickers emerging as the prevailing choices.

In the research, it was found that the writings located behind trucks in South Sulawesi consists of monolingual; trucks that use Indonesian as monolingual and trucks that use local languages as monolingual. The data also found that there are trucks

that use English as a second language and the usage of two languages; local language and bahasa Indonesia. The use of English as a second language on the rear writings of trucks indicates a tendency towards bilingualism in Indonesian society. Bilingualism refers to the ability of individuals to actively and effectively use two languages in their daily lives. Bilingualism has significant benefits in life, such as facilitating communication with people from diverse cultural backgrounds and opening up wider job opportunities in the era of globalization. Additionally, bilingualism can enhance cognitive abilities, such as speeding up the learning process and increasing creativity. From the data found, the use of bilingualism is still very limited and was observed mainly on trucks in Makassar. The detailed findings will be explained in the data below:



Figure 1. Sample of Bilingualism behind the Trucks [Data 1]

The word "goodbye" is an English word that means "farewell" in Indonesian. The usage of this word on trucks in the data above indicates language variation and the influence of globalization on the language used on vehicles. The use of English on trucks is seen as a form of adaptation and modernization in language usage. This is due to the development of technology and communication, which has facilitated access to and influence of foreign cultures, including the English language. This is also reflected in the phrase "Open BO." The language variation on trucks in South Sulawesi can also reflect the identity and cultural diversity within society. This is further emphasized by the phrases "Mallogae" and "Alani Pura Tona ambilmi ka," which are used in the writings on the truck body, reflecting the dominant influence of local languages in South Sulawesi. According to Ratuanggi (24 years old; informant 1) the widespread use of bilingualism is due to modernization and the increasing influence of foreign cultures in Sulawesi, making English a highly effective promotional tool. If many trucks have images and writing in English, it will definitely attract more attention. This can be a free form of promotion for our region.



Figure 2. Language Variation in Bilingualism

Data two above shows the usage of language variation in bilingualism, which is a mixture of Indonesian and local languages in the truck writings in Makassar city. The word "ghosting" is an adaptation from English, which means to disappear or eliminate traces. The usage of this word on trucks in South Sulawesi indicates language variation in truck writings that reflects the influence of foreign languages on Indonesian. Additionally, language variation in truck writings is also evident in the usage of the word "korban," which has the same meaning as "victim" in Indonesian. However, the usage of the word "korban" in truck writings can also reflect the influence of local languages or the usage of words that are more commonly known in certain regions. The use of language variation in truck writings can serve

as an expression of local cultural identity and the distinctiveness of regional languages. This practice reflects an effort to celebrate linguistic diversity and convey cultural pride. However, such variation may also present challenges in communication between communities that speak different languages. According to Informant 2, many young people today perceive the use of English in truck imagery and text as stylish and modern. This perception drives young artists and truck drivers, particularly those between the ages of 17 and 25, to design their trucks with visuals and phrases that incorporate English. Informant 2 further explained:

"I think English is cool and modern. Many people understand it, so it can be a topic of conversation with others on the road. Also, there are many songs and movies that use English, so I wanted to try it on my truck" (Informant 2-SS.11).

Informant 2 emphasizes that English is widely regarded by the younger generation as a reflection of modernity and a symbol of being fashionable. This perception reinforces the idea that English plays a dual role, functioning not only as a medium for international communication but also as an emblem of elevated social standing and global awareness. Its strong presence across various forms of popular culture, especially in music, films, social media, and other digital platforms, has shaped how young people relate to and interact with the language. For many, using English goes beyond practical communication and becomes a way to align themselves with contemporary values, cosmopolitan lifestyles, and global cultural flows. As a result, English is often chosen as a linguistic expression of modern identity, especially among youth who seek to distinguish themselves as part of a globalized and digitally connected generation.

"Just to look cool, you know. When there's English writing, people will definitely take a look. And when I'm delivering goods out of town, it can be a topic of conversation with people on the road." (Informant 3-SS.12)

Informant 3 further highlights the visual appeal and social interaction that arise from using English on truck surfaces. According to this informant, English serves not only to draw attention but also to initiate conversations and build connections during long-distance journeys. This underscores how language functions as more than just a communicative tool; it also facilitates spontaneous social bonding while on the move. The interview data collectively indicate that English plays a significant role in shaping visual culture, especially among younger generations. Its use reflects the complex interplay between globalization and local identity. Rather than erasing cultural roots, the incorporation of English into truck inscriptions enhances self-expression and affirms a sense of belonging within both local and global contexts.



Figure 3. Language Variation in Bilingualism

The writing on the truck that reads "*Gagal jadi Kallolo tetapi tidak gagal jadi menantu Bu Aji*" illustrates a form of language variation categorized as bilingualism, as it merges two distinct languages: the Makassar language and Indonesian. The term "*Kallolo*" originates from the Makassar language, commonly spoken in South Sulawesi, while "*menantu*" is a word derived from standard Indonesian. The inclusion of the phrase "*Bu Aji*" in the sentence adds a deeper cultural nuance, indicating either local familiarity or the influence of regional language traditions often found in truck writings. This type of language variation serves not only as a creative expression but also as a vehicle for reinforcing local cultural identity, offering uniqueness and a sense of belonging through linguistic choices. At the same time, such variation can pose communication challenges among people from different linguistic backgrounds, especially when the languages used are not widely understood outside the local context.

One of the informants expressed a personal view on using English in truck design, stating that for many young people, incorporating English is like making a public statement that they are modern, culturally open, and in tune with global trends. Language becomes a powerful tool for delivering a message, and English, in particular, is perceived as capable of reaching a wider audience because it is broadly recognized and understood. However, the informant also acknowledged a potential gap in comprehension when driving through rural areas, where English may not be easily understood by all. In contrast, urban settings offer a more receptive environment where such messages are more likely to be interpreted as intended.

Findings from the field indicate that the use of English in truck decoration is increasingly common among the younger generation. This trend reflects the impact of globalization and popular culture on identity expression. The adoption of English is not solely driven by aesthetic appeal or a desire to appear modern, but also by the ambition to differentiate oneself, stay aligned with contemporary trends, and communicate across a broader cultural spectrum.



Figure 4. Language Variation in Bilingualism

The writing on the truck "*Maharnya anakta bikin oleng-oleng mobilku*" is another example of language variation in truck writings in South Sulawesi. The word "*mahar*" comes from Arabic and means "*dowry*" in Indonesian. The usage of the word "*ankta*" considered as local language used by the people of South Sulawesi, while the word "*oleng-oleng*" is a regional term that means "*skid*" or "*slip*" in Indonesian. The phrase "*Maharnya ankta bikin oleng-oleng mobilku*" on a South Sulawesi truck not only showcases linguistic diversity but also reflects the interplay between language, culture, and economic factors within the region's geographic context. Truck writings can serve as a form of informal advertising for local businesses. The use of local languages and dialects can make advertisements more relatable and effective for the target audience, especially when supplemented with Arabic, which clarifies the message conveyed through the text and images on the trucks, given that the areas where they travel are predominantly inhabited by Muslims. Additionally, the use of bilingual writing on trucks incorporates references to local landmarks, natural features, or historical events, which reinforces a sense of place-based identity and connection to the surrounding geographic environment.

Monolingualism in truck writings refers to the use of a single language in the messages displayed on the rear side of trucks, which are typically written either in Indonesian or in one of the local languages spoken throughout South Sulawesi. This approach to language use plays a significant role in ensuring clear and direct communication among members of a particular linguistic community. By relying on a single, familiar language, truck owners and drivers can minimize the risk of misinterpretation and make their messages easily understood by those who share the same linguistic background. Beyond its communicative function, monolingualism also contributes to the reinforcement of cultural identity. When local languages are used exclusively, they reflect and preserve the unique linguistic characteristics of a community.

This practice not only strengthens the cultural fabric of the region but also highlights the importance of safeguarding linguistic heritage through everyday visual expressions in public spaces such as trucks. In this way, monolingual truck writings serve both practical and symbolic purposes within the social and cultural landscape of South Sulawesi.



Figure 5. Sample of Monolingualism

The writing found on the back of a truck in South Sulawesi that reads "jaga jarak bosku" (keep your distance, my boss) serves as a clear example of monolingual language use, specifically in the Indonesian language. This phrase illustrates how truck drivers utilize everyday language to deliver simple yet impactful messages. In this case, the choice to use Indonesian represents a deliberate decision to communicate effectively with a broad audience. The use of a single, widely understood language helps ensure that the message is accessible to people across different regions and linguistic backgrounds. This monolingual approach reflects a practical strategy aimed at maximizing clarity on the road, especially in contexts where quick comprehension is essential for safety and interaction.

In an interview, the truck owner, Mr. Andi, was asked whether he had ever considered using a local language or English in his truck's writing. He responded by saying, "Yes, I have, but I think Indonesian is easier for everyone to understand. I want my message to be understood by everyone who sees my truck" (Interview-SS.13). This statement highlights Mr. Andi's belief in the communicative efficiency of Indonesian. He views it as a more universal language that transcends ethnic and regional boundaries, enabling his message to reach a wider audience. Rather than opting for language that might be culturally rich but limited in reach, he prioritizes inclusivity and clarity. This reflects a broader trend among truck drivers who prefer to use Indonesian to ensure that their messages resonate across various social groups and settings.



Figure 6. Language Variation in Bilingualism

The data "*hati-hati keluarga anda menunggu di rumah*" (be careful, your family is waiting at home) on the rear writing of the truck shows the usage of monolingualism in the Indonesian language. There doesn't appear to be any language variation or a mixture of Indonesian and local languages in the writing. The monolingual use of Indonesian in the back of the truck indicates a tendency to use the official language or standard language in written communication, which is typically understood by people across different regions of Indonesia. This can facilitate communication between regions that have different local languages.



Figure 7. Language Variation in Bilingualism

The phrase "bombonna jeka" found on the back of a truck represents the use of the local Bugis Makassar language, indicating a clear example of monolingualism within the regional linguistic context. In this instance, the exclusive use of a local language without any inclusion of Indonesian or foreign terms reflects a conscious effort by the truck owner to engage with a specific linguistic community. Such a choice is likely aimed at reaching a familiar audience, making the message more relatable and effective, especially for promoting local products, values, or

sentiments within the region. By addressing the audience in their native tongue, the truck's message resonates more deeply and personally, reinforcing cultural bonds.

Based on interview findings, it was revealed that the use of local languages on trucks contributes to fostering a strong sense of community and belonging among residents. This linguistic familiarity can lead to greater trust, loyalty, and social cohesion, which ultimately benefits local businesses and supports regional economic development. Moreover, the distinctive use of local languages in public and mobile signage, such as truck writings, can be interpreted as a form of cultural tourism. It attracts the interest of visitors who are keen to experience the authentic cultural and linguistic atmosphere of the area, potentially offering added value to the region's cultural economy. The inscription "bombonna jeka" not only serves as a linguistic artifact but also underscores the significance of preserving and celebrating local identity in South Sulawesi. It demonstrates how language continues to function as a powerful medium for expressing cultural uniqueness and strengthening solidarity within the same linguistic group. This cultural expression is further reinforced in other examples, including [figure 8](#), which also features the use of local language in similar contexts.



Figure 8. Language Variation in Bilingualism

[Figure 8](#) presents another compelling example of bilingualism in truck writings, where the combination of Indonesian and a local language is used to convey humor, identity, and emotion. The inscription reflects a culturally embedded expression that integrates familiar local terms with more widely understood Indonesian words, allowing the message to remain accessible while still resonating with regional identity. This blending of languages serves not only to entertain but also to express social commentary or personal sentiment in a way that connects with a broad spectrum of audiences. The strategic mixing of codes reflects the speaker's linguistic flexibility and cultural awareness, showing how drivers creatively negotiate language choices to achieve both impact and

relatability. Moreover, this bilingual form may carry layered meanings understood only by locals, adding an element of exclusivity and cultural pride. Such inscriptions contribute to the dynamic linguistic landscape of South Sulawesi by showcasing the creative intersections of language, humor, and community identity.

The findings from the field data illustrate a rich spectrum of language use on trucks in South Sulawesi, encompassing monolingual expressions in both Indonesian and local languages, as well as bilingual combinations involving English, Indonesian, and regional vernaculars. Indonesian is predominantly featured in urban settings where communication across different groups is prioritized, while local languages are more common in rural areas, reflecting strong ties to cultural heritage and community identity. The presence of bilingual expressions, especially those combining Indonesian with English or local dialects, reveals how language choices are shaped by geographic, social, and economic contexts. English is often associated with modernity and global appeal, while local language usage underscores community solidarity and cultural pride. These patterns of language use are not arbitrary but are informed by the drivers' intentions, audience reach, and aesthetic preferences. Altogether, the result section highlights how truck writings function as a living linguistic canvas that mirrors South Sulawesi's diverse cultural landscape. The inscriptions are not merely decorative elements but serve as meaningful expressions of identity, mobility, humor, and social belonging, reinforcing the significance of language in shaping the region's visual and communicative environment.

5. Discussion

The linguistic expressions found on trucks in South Sulawesi reveal critical insights into the intersection of language, space, identity, and economy. The study identifies three dominant linguistic practices: monolingual Indonesian, monolingual local languages, and bilingual expressions that merge Indonesian with either English or local languages. These findings demonstrate that the use of language in truck inscriptions is not random but deeply shaped by geographical settings, communicative purposes, and socio-economic functions. Indonesian is widely adopted in urban zones for its accessibility and national unifying role, whereas local languages dominate rural routes where cultural intimacy is prioritized. Bilingual writings, especially Indonesian-English, emerge in semi-urban areas and among younger drivers, suggesting a linguistic negotiation between traditional values and global influences.

The dominance of Indonesian in truck writings across urban areas underscores its role as the primary medium for public communication in multilingual societies. This finding aligns with [Iye's \(2023\)](#) assertion that Indonesian functions effectively as a

bridge language in linguistically diverse contexts. In commercial areas, truck writings featuring Indonesian serve as tools for business promotion, brand recognition, and logistical clarity. This reinforces Papadopoulos and Heslop's (2014) concept of language as an economic agent that contributes to product visibility and brand credibility in a competitive marketplace. The use of simple language and imagery on urban trucks plays a crucial role in semiotic design, enhancing communication in fast-paced, high-traffic environments through clear and accessible visual cues (Bellentani et al., 2024; Chernyavskaya, 2022). These trucks, adorned with digestible visual and textual elements, contribute not only to immediate message delivery but also to broader urban narratives and identity formation. As Remm (2016, 2024) argues, urban spaces function as layered texts, with signs and symbols mediating how individuals perceive and engage with their surroundings. The clarity of truck visuals supports this textualization process, reducing misinterpretation while amplifying cultural resonance (Chernyavskaya, 2022).

Moreover, semiotic practices in public design extend beyond aesthetics to serve as essential tools for effective communication in densely populated settings, aligning with theories that highlight the significance of concise, recognizable messaging in shaping urban identities (Mueller & Schade, 2012; Krzyżanowska, 2016; Alhusban & Alhusban, 2021). This approach fosters inclusivity across diverse social backgrounds, reinforcing the public value of trucks as mobile carriers of meaning that reflect and shape the socio-cultural dynamics of urban life (Adami, 2018; Remm, 2024). Monolingual inscriptions in local languages, more frequently observed in rural contexts, signify strong regional pride and cultural rootedness. As Hasan (2019) and Hasyim (2024) emphasize, the use of indigenous languages in public texts reinforces linguistic heritage and collective memory. These truck writings function as cultural affirmations, preserving dialectal uniqueness and regional narratives that might otherwise be marginalized.

Furthermore, Language plays a pivotal role in fostering emotional connections and reinforcing cultural identity within localized communities, especially in rural economic systems. Its deliberate use supports interpersonal transactions while also cultivating a sense of belonging, familiarity, and meaningful engagement among individuals (Luna & Peracchio, 2001; Yen et al., 2014). The subtle characteristics of local language forms function as markers of identity and signals of community membership, which in turn strengthen emotional ties among speakers. This pattern is also evident in communication and advertising studies, where language congruity enhances audience engagement, improves memory retention, and aligns messaging with the intended demographic, as seen in job

advertisements that reflect socio-economic targeting (Meurs et al., 2015; Zenner et al., 2013). Furthermore, language serves not only as a medium of expression but also as a cultural symbol that resonates deeply with community members, influencing the quality of social interactions and the success of communication outcomes (Ramsberger & Rende, 2002; Fatma et al., 2018). In this context, the use of localized language in expressions such as truck inscriptions should be understood as both a communicative and identity-affirming strategy. By establishing emotional resonance and enhancing local engagement, these linguistic practices contribute to smoother interpersonal exchanges and support the sustainability of rural economic activities, as affirmed by a broad range of interdisciplinary research (Locher, 2015; Horowitz, 2004).

Bilingual expressions, particularly Indonesian-English combinations, reflect the influence of globalization and the symbolic capital of English. Informants describe English as trendy, modern, and aspirational, a perception shaped by global media exposure and digital culture. This finding supports Hu's (2014) interpretation of English as a marker of modern identity and upward mobility. In these contexts, English is not used solely for communication but as a visual and social performance, signaling sophistication, cosmopolitan values, and youth identity. English also expands the communicative reach of truck texts, enabling them to engage wider and potentially international audiences, including tourists and cross-regional traders.

By contrast, bilingualism involving Indonesian and local languages represents a hybrid communicative model rooted in both accessibility and cultural belonging. This practice reveals an inclusive linguistic strategy that honors local heritage while ensuring mutual intelligibility. As seen in Data 8, such inscriptions often carry layered meanings, understood best within specific cultural contexts, and thus foster both identity recognition and communal bonding. This type of bilingualism contributes to social cohesion by validating local linguistic forms within the national language framework, echoing the ideas of Nguyen and Hamid (2018) regarding bilingualism as a social and emotional resource.

While the linguistic landscape literature has explored signage in static public spaces, there has been limited focus on mobile linguistic artifacts such as truck inscriptions, especially in the Indonesian context. This study fills the gap by viewing trucks as mobile linguistic landscapes that move language across social, economic, and geographic contexts. It offers theoretical insight by treating vehicular texts as agents of cultural transmission, linguistic negotiation, and symbolic exchange. These inscriptions, more than decoration, carry layered meanings shaped by shifting social dynamics and language ideologies.

Although linguistic landscape studies have traditionally focused on static signage in public spaces, this study introduces the novel conceptualization of trucks as dynamic linguistic landscapes. Unlike static signs, trucks move across varied terrains, spreading language and culture in fluid, spatially diverse ways. This mobile characteristic enables truck inscriptions to function as symbolic agents of cultural dissemination, socio-linguistic negotiation, and economic messaging. The study therefore adds theoretical innovation by reframing vehicular texts as performative linguistic artifacts embedded with cultural, geographic, and socio-political significance.

Overall, this study positions truck inscriptions not merely as decorative choices but as mobile narratives of language ideologies, cultural affiliation, and economic intent. The findings have significant practical implications for policy makers, cultural advocates, and creative industries. Mobile texts can be leveraged in initiatives to promote local tourism, advance community branding, and develop context-sensitive multilingual education strategies. In doing so, truck inscriptions become instrumental in regional language preservation and cultural innovation.

For future research, it is recommended to explore how similar vehicular language practices manifest in other Indonesian provinces or in cross-national contexts where multilingualism intersects with mobility. Investigating the impact of digital media, online trends, and social networking on the evolution of truck inscriptions may also yield insights into how traditional expressions are being reshaped within contemporary visual culture. Such inquiries will deepen our understanding of how language, identity, and economy co-evolve in mobile and mediated public spaces.

6. Conclusions

The study reveals that truck inscriptions in South Sulawesi are not merely communicative devices but are also vibrant, mobile representations of linguistic diversity, cultural identity, and socio-economic dynamics. The key findings indicate that Indonesian is predominantly used in urban centers, local languages are more frequently found in rural areas, and bilingual combinations, particularly Indonesian-English and local-Indonesian, often appear in suburban or transitional zones. These linguistic choices are influenced by geographical context, cultural affiliation, and intended audience. A central novelty of this research lies in its framing of trucks as mobile linguistic landscapes, offering a fresh perspective that extends beyond traditional analyses of fixed public signage. This approach highlights how language moves fluidly across geographic regions, carrying embedded meanings that are continuously shaped and reshaped through cultural practices, spatial mobility, and economic interactions within diverse social environments.

The study holds valuable implications for language policy, cultural preservation, and creative industry practices, especially in leveraging informal texts for tourism, community branding, and multilingual education. It encourages a deeper understanding of how mobile language practices reflect evolving identity constructions within Indonesia's complex linguistic ecosystem. For future research, it is recommended to conduct comparative studies in other Indonesian provinces or in cross-cultural contexts, examining how digital culture, youth expression, and global linguistic influences continue to reshape public and mobile discourse.

5. Acknowledgement

Best gratitude is delivered to Hasanuddin Makassar University for funding this research in the category of Research and Community Service Institute grant with No. Contract 00323/UN4.22/PT.01.03/2023. And the biggest gratitude also to the editor of the REILA (Journal of Research and Innovation in Language) who is ready to guide us in the process of publishing our articles

References

- Adami, E. (2018). Styling the self online: Semiotic technologization in weblog publishing. *Social Semiotics*, *28*(5), 601–622. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10350330.2017.1334387>
- Alhusban, A. A., & Alhusban, S. A. (2021). Relocating the identity of Amman's city through the hybridization process. *Journal of Place Management and Development*, *14*(2), 81–113. <https://doi.org/10.1108/JPM-D-2020-0052>
- Artawa, I. K. (2004). *Balinese language: A typological description*. CV. Bali Media Adhikarsa.
- Beeh, N., Nenotek, S., Snae, A., & Benu, N. (2022). Multilingualism in the linguistic landscape of transportation in Kupang. *LiNGUA: Jurnal Ilmu Bahasa dan Sastra*, *17*(2), 187–198. <https://doi.org/10.18860/ling.v17i2.17737>
- Bellentani, F., Panico, M., & Yoka, L. (Eds.). (2024). *Semiotic approaches to urban space: Signs and cities*. Edward Elgar Publishing.
- Bungin, B. (2017). *Metode penelitian kualitatif*. PT Raja Grafindo Persada.
- Chernyavskaya, V. E. (2022). Typographic landscape in urban space: A sociolinguistic approach. *Slovo.ru: Baltic Accent*, *13*(4), 71–84. <https://doi.org/10.5922/2225-5346-2022-4-5>
- Damaskinidis, G., Kourdis, E., Zantides, E., & Sykioti, E. (2018). Eye-tracking the semiotic effects of layout on viewing print advertisements. *Public Journal of Semiotics*, *8*(1), 46–66. <https://doi.org/10.37693/pjos.2017.8.17326>

- Fatma, F., Sumarlam, S., & Suwandi, S. (2018). Various language choice factors on local language directive speech acts at university in Central of Sulawesi. In *Proceedings of the International Conference on Teacher Training and Education 2018 (ICTTE 2018)* (pp. 57–66). Atlantis Press. <https://doi.org/10.2991/ictte-18.2018.10>
- Florenta, S., & Rahmawati, L. E. (2021). Lanskap linguistik multibahasa dalam ruang publik pariwisata Kabupaten Gunung Kidul. *Proceeding of The URECOL*, 13(1), 57–63.
- Gorter, D. (2013). Linguistic landscapes in a multilingual world. *Annual Review of Applied Linguistics*, 33, 190–212. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0267190513000100>
- Ha, T. T. X. (2024). An investigation into psychological influence techniques using language and visuals in milk advertising in English and Vietnamese. *Global Academic Journal of Humanities and Social Sciences*, 6(1), 8–17. <https://doi.org/10.36348/gajhss.2024.v06i01.002>
- Hasan, N. H. (2019). Keterkendalian penggunaan bahasa indonesia pada "Media Luar Ruang" di kota Ambon. *Jurnal Totobuang*, 7(1), 1–33. <https://doi.org/10.26499/tbng.v7i2.156>
- Haspelmath, M. (Ed.). (2005). *The world atlas of language structures*. Oxford University Press.
- Hasyim, B. (2024). Islam garassik: Double minority struggles and survival strategies in a multicultural society. *Al-Qalam*, 30*(1), 50–65. <https://doi.org/10.31969/alq.v30i1.1401>
- Hong, S. (2020). Linguistic landscapes on street-level images. *ISPRS International Journal of Geo-Information*, 9(1), 57. <https://doi.org/10.3390/ijgi9010057>
- Horowitz, L. M. (2004). *Interpersonal foundations of psychopathology*. American Psychological Association. <https://doi.org/10.24843/e-jl.2019.v13.i02.p12>
- Hu, A. (2014). Languages and identities. In *Sociolinguistic studies* (pp. 87–102). De Gruyter. <https://doi.org/10.1515/9783110302257.87>
- Hu, H. (2023). Linguistic landscapes in Southeast Asia: The politics of language and public signage. *Sociolinguistic Studies*, 17(4), 481–485. <https://doi.org/10.1558/sols.25576>
- Itaristanti. (2012). Bahasa dan kelas sosial: Studi kasus variasi bahasa sopir dan kondektur angkutan kota di Yogyakarta. *Eduksos: Jurnal Pendidikan Sosial & Ekonomi*, 1(1), 45–60.
- Iye, R., Simpen, I. W., Sedeng, I. N., Netra, I. M., Said, I. M., & Abida, F. I. N. (2023). Language contextualization in public space in Maluku Province: A landscape linguistics study. *Cogent Arts & Humanities*, 10(1), 2247648. <https://doi.org/10.1080/23311983.2023.2247648>
- Kallen, J. L. (2023). *Linguistic Landscapes: A sociolinguistic approach*. Cambridge University Press.
- Kamengko, D., & Benu, N. (2022). Language on Bemo in Kupang: A linguistic landscape approach. *Journal on Interdisciplinary Studies in Humanities*, 5(4), 412–425. <https://doi.org/10.31291/hn.v12i1.693>
- Kamraju, M. (2023). Yoga: An Exploration of its Cultural Adaptation and Practice in Japan. *Japanedu: Journal of Japanese Language and Teaching*, 8(1), 54–59. <https://doi.org/10.17509/japanedu.v8i1.57870>
- Krzyżanowska, N. (2016). The discourse of counter-monuments: Semiotics of material commemoration in contemporary urban spaces. *Social Semiotics*, 26*(5), 465–485. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10350330.2015.1134825>
- Kurniawati, A. (2023). Signage Function in the Culinary Business: A Linguistic landscape of Youngsters Language. *Proceedings of the 5th International Conference on Language, Literature, and Culture (ICLLC 2023)*. <https://doi.org/10.4108/eai.11-7-2023.2340600>
- Locher, M. A. (2015). “After all, the last thing I wanted to be was rude”: Raising of pragmatic awareness through reflective writing. In B. Pizziconi & M. A. Locher (Eds.), *Teaching and learning (im)politeness* (pp. 185–210). De Gruyter. <https://doi.org/10.1515/9781501501654-008>
- Luna, D., & Peracchio, L. A. (2001). Moderators of language effects in advertising to bilinguals: A psycholinguistic approach. *Journal of Consumer Research*, 28(2), 284–295. <https://doi.org/10.1086/322903>
- Mahmood, F., Zahra, S., & Noor, A. (2025). A semiotic analysis of billboards in Islamabad's I-8 Markaz: Exploring visual communication and cultural representation. *Journal of Applied Linguistics and Semiotics*, 3(1), 543–561. <https://doi.org/10.71281/jals.v3i1.235>
- Mahsun. (2012). *Metode Penelitian Bahasa: Tahapan Strategi, Metode, dan Tekniknya* (Edisi revisi). Rajawali Pers.
- Meurs, F. van, Planken, B., Korzilius, H., & Gerritsen, M. (2015). Reasons for using English or the local

- language in the genre of job advertisements: Insights from interviews with Dutch job ad designers. *IEEE Transactions on Professional Communication*, 58(1), 86–105. <https://doi.org/10.1109/TPC.2015.2423351>
- Mooney, A., & Evans, B. (2023). Linguistic landscapes. In *Language, Society, and Power* (5th ed., pp. 94–127).
- Mueller, A., & Schade, M. (2012). Symbols and place identity: A semiotic approach to internal place branding—case study Bremen (Germany). *Journal of Place Management and Development*, 5*(1), 81–92. <https://doi.org/10.1108/17538331211209035>
- Mulyawan, I. W. (2020). Reading visual design of outdoor signs in Kuta (a case study of multimodal linguistic landscapes). *Cogent Arts & Humanities*, 7(1), 1748987. <https://doi.org/10.1080/23311983.2020.1748987>
- Mulyawan, I. W., & Erawawti, N. K. R. (2019). Linguistic Landscapes in desa Kuta. E. *Journal of Linguistics*, 13(2), 327.
- Nash, J. (2019). *Linguistic landscapes and language education*. Routledge.
- Nguyen, T. T. T., & Hamid, M. O. (2018). Bilingualism as a resource: Language attitudes of Vietnamese ethnic minority students. *Current Issues in Language Planning*, 19(4), 343–362. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14664208.2017.1337922>
- Nishijima, Y. (2022). A stylistic analysis of stickers on cars as linguistic landscapes. *Studies in Stylistics*, 68, 1–16. <https://kanazawa-u.repo.nii.ac.jp/records/62909>
- Papadopoulos, N., & Heslop, L. A. (2014). *Product-country images: Impact and role in international marketing*. Routledge.
- Passera, S., Smedlund, A., & Liinasuo, M. (2016). Exploring contract visualization: Clarification and framing strategies to shape collaborative business relationships. *Journal of Strategic Contracting and Negotiation*, 2(1–2), 69–100. <https://doi.org/10.1177/2055563616669739>
- Prihandini, A., & Isnendes, R. (2020). Variasi bahasa pada tuturan seorang anak di masyarakat multibahasa (studi kasus pada anak usia 12 tahun di sebuah keluarga di kota Bandung). In *Prosiding Seminar Nasional Linguistik dan Sastra (Semantiks)* (pp. 553–559). Universitas Sebelas Maret.
- Putra, I. (2023). Linguistic landscape in Beringkit public market. *Sphota: Jurnal Linguistik dan Sastra*, 15(2), 123–132. <https://doi.org/10.36733/sphota.v15i2.7562>
- Ramsberger, G., & Rende, B. (2002). Measuring transactional success in the conversation of people with aphasia. *Aphasiology*, 16(3), 337–353. <https://doi.org/10.1080/02687040143000636>
- Remm, T. (2016). Textualities of the city—from the legibility of urban space towards social and natural others in planning. *Σημειωτική-Sign Systems Studies*, 44*(1–2), 34–52. <https://doi.org/10.12697/SSS.2016.44.1-2.03>
- Remm, T. (2024). Towards a chronotopical analysis of urban squares. *Semiotika*, 19*(2), 142–159.
- Santoso, B. (2017). Bahasa dan identitas budaya. *Sabda: Jurnal Kajian Kebudayaan*, 1(1), 1–12. <https://doi.org/10.14710/sabda.v1i1.13266>
- Sapir, E. (1924). *Language: An introduction to the study of speech*. Harcourt, Brace & World.
- Sarniwati, N., Hanafi, N., & Nuriadi, N. (2022). The pattern and representation of linguistic landscape in multilingual context in Selong. *International Journal of Linguistics, Literature and Culture*, 8(4), 138–144. <https://doi.org/10.21744/ijllc.v8n4.2111>
- Tartaglia, S., & Rossi, M. (2015). The local identity functions in the age of globalization: A study on a local culture. *Community Psychology in Global Perspective*, 1(1), 105–121
- Vesya, N. F., & Datang, F. A. (2022). Lanskap linguistik stasiun MRT Lebak Bulus Grab. In *Prosiding Konferensi Linguistik Tahunan Atma Jaya (KOLITA 20)* (pp. 232–243). <https://doi.org/10.25170/kolita.20.3800>
- Wang, N. (2021). Advertising and consumers' enthusiasm. *Scientific and Social Research*, 3(2), 82–85. <https://doi.org/10.36922/ssr.v3i2.1108>
- Yen, C.-H., Liu, L.-L., Chen, C.-Y., & Lee, T.-Y. (2014). Customer relational benefits and relationship-marketing outcomes: Comparing three transaction types of travel product. *Asia Pacific Journal of Tourism Research*, 20(2), 171–190. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10941665.2013.877042>
- Yulianti, S., Purwaningsih, P., Fatina, S., & Budiono, S. (2022). Activating minority languages in Sulawesi through revitalization. In *Proceedings of the International Conference on Language and Linguistics* (pp. 517–523). Atlantis Press. https://doi.org/10.2991/978-2-494069-91-6_81
- Zenner, E., Speelman, D., & Geeraerts, D. (2013). Macro and micro perspectives on the distribution of English in Dutch: A quantitative usage-based analysis of job ads. *Linguistics*, 51(5), 1019–1054. <https://doi.org/10.1515/ling-2013-0036>