

## MULTILINGUISTICISM IN THE LINGUISTIC LANDSCAPE OF TRANSPORTATION IN KUPANG

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**Abstract:** This article discusses the language form and the symbolic function of quotes or slogans on transportation around Kupang city. The data of this study were collected directly from the transportation around the streets. They were analyzed using qualitative methods, while the symbolic functions were analyzed using a critical discourse analysis model. It found that land transportation uses multi-languages, English, Indonesian, Kupang Malay, Uab Meto (Dawan), Rote, Sabu, Hebrew, Latin, and Betawi. Some use a particular style of language, such as *p27den*, and a combination of two or more languages or dialects. English is the most dominant language used. The lack of local languages shows massive cultural changes and people's attitudes toward local languages. The linguistic unit consists of words, phrases, clauses, sentences, and acronyms. English is dominant in each linguistic unit except in acronyms. The quotes represent six themes: love, religion, music, power, family, and regionalism. In general, They carry two functions, power relations, and identity.

**Keywords:** Linguistic landscape, symbolic function, written language, language form, land transportation

### INTRODUCTION

Public transport is a means of transportation inseparable from the life of urban communities to commute for their activities. It is commonly used because it is fast, cheap, and easy to find. Besides, it can reduce the use of private vehicles to suppress traffic jams. One of the interesting aspects of land transportation in Kupang is the quote on the body of those vehicles. They are found in all types of land transportation around Kupang or at least those that commute around Kupang, such as *bemo* (minibus), bus, truck, pickup, and others. These quotes have their styles and languages with different language forms. For example, they might be written in words with various styles, phrases, clauses, and sentences. The forms and styles of language in this mode of transportation are written in diverse languages. Also, they are written in monolingualistic, bilingualistic, and multilingualistic languages.

The quotes attracted a lot of researchers to study and explore more on that phenomenon. Beeh (2017) studied the sayings written on *bemo*, also a type of public transportation in Kupang, based on speech acts theory. He found three types and six functions of speech act in *bemo*. In addition, Tenate et al. (2020) elaborated on it from a critical discourse point of view. According to them, these texts refer to people's social behavior, either positive or negative, because they have power relations and ideologies, namely liberalism, feminism, religion, and capitalism. According to Tenate, et al., the quotes on the body of the *bemo* were made by the owner or driver to decorate and attract passengers' attention, or it might only be for jokes.

Interestingly, they are found not only on *bemos* but also on all types of land transportation. The phenomena of the sayings have become salience to the public in Kupang. Studies on language in public spaces have become the focus of some linguists in the last

two decades under the name linguistic landscape (LL) since introduced by Landry & Bourhis (1997). According to Ben-Rafael, (2009) and Gorter (2018), LL focuses on analyzing the language used and can be used as an object of research to understand motives, uses, ideologies, language variations, and contestation of languages in the public space. In addition, Cenoz & Gorter (2006) argue that LL or parts of LL strongly influence language use. They explain that a person processes information from what is seen or what appears to him, and therefore language, in this case, quotes on land transportation, will obviously influence his perception of the status of the language they see and will even result in attitudes towards his language.

The use of language in public spaces reflects the interaction among various factors, such as ethnic, political, ideological, commercial, or economic, in specific social contexts (Benu, 2021; 2022). One of the functions of landscape linguistics is the symbolic function, which is the implicit message in the language in which these signs are written (Landry & Bourhis, 1997). The symbolic function of a language is more profound than its surface meaning, for example, to refer to culture, identity, power relations, and language status. In the symbolic function, a language in a particular public sphere generates the feeling of belonging to a group in that area. The symbolic function is also closely related to the representation of ethnic identity. The symbolic function of signs in public spaces is an implicit message in the language these signs are written. In addition, the sign also has a function symbol that represents an ideology. There is a deeper meaning beneath the surface. It means that this symbolic function goes beyond communicating information. In addition to representing linguistic functions, signs also have social, cultural, political, and economic functions. The symbolic function also shows significant symbolic meaning for the community in a region (Yendra et al., 2020). Therefore, language in the public sphere can be considered a powerful inclusion and exclusion mechanism, and therefore also expresses creating identity. Some aspects show symbolic functions, such as culture, identity, power relations, and language status.

Based on the explanation above, quotes on land transportation around Kupang are a combination of linguistic symbols presented in public spaces as a form of expression that builds discourse on social behavior (Ben-Rafael et al., 2006). However, since discourse often refers to "the use of language," it can also have a more specific meaning, referring to the way texts work in context or more broadly as a general mode of semiosis (i.e., meaningful symbolic behavior) that reflects, shapes, and maintains ideology that makes up a culture.

This article aimed to explore the language used, including the form or linguistic unit and the symbolic function of the quotes on land transportation in Kupang.

In addition, this work is done under the framework of the linguistic landscape (LL) approach. Shohamy & Gorter (2009) noted that the languages in LL research that can be categorized as public spaces are those found around the cities, indoor markets, outdoor shopping centers, shops, schools, government offices, large companies, moving vehicles, campuses, beaches, and even cyberspace. The LL approach does not only function as a tool to calculate the composition of language in the public space but, most importantly, as a tool to examine various factors such as power relations, population, laws and regulations, and symbolic functions, which are viewed, processed, and reflected in different populations within a small geographic area (Ben Rafael et al., 2006).

The form of language referred to in this article is descriptive and is formed by a framework-free theoretical description from Haspelmath (2009), namely a description of the language grounded not only in a particular theoretical framework. Nevertheless, the form of language, especially the microform in sayings on land transportation in Kupang, follows the tradition of descriptive linguistics. This analysis involves concepts from traditional linguistics and various current theoretical frameworks, including the framework of Basic Linguistic Theory (Dixon, 2010a, 2010b, Dryer, 2006, Payne, 1997). This linguistic form also involves the morphosyntactic description of Indonesian grammar by Sneddon et al. (2010). By the descriptive linguistic theoretical references, this study will reveal the form of language on the land transportation in Kupang, namely

micro-linguistic units. Micro-linguistic units include words, phrases, clauses, and sentences.

This study of quotes on land transportation in Kupang within the framework of linguistics landscape will contribute to linguistic landscape studies that are currently developing. This article describes the contestation of languages that vary widely, from English as a global language, national or official language, and ethnic languages in public spaces. This article also discusses the form of written language micro-linguistically and the function of the written language.

Therefore, this study is a way to determine which language dominates the public space, especially in land transportation around Kupang. In addition, it can provide information on some people's attitudes, preferences, and ideologies, especially those who produce the quotes, the drivers, or the vehicle owners. The result can also be essential knowledge for sociolinguistics or landscape linguistics researchers, the education sector, and the government regarding language policy in Kupang, East Nusa Tenggara, and Indonesia.

## RESEARCH METHOD

This research is a combination of qualitative and quantitative research. The quantitative approach aims to map linguistic and multilingual diversity on land transportation modes in Kupang. This quantitative data is obtained by documenting the visual languages and seeing the presentation of the emergence of language. In comparison, qualitative is used to analyze language attitudes through a linguistic landscape approach. In qualitative research, the emphasis is on observation participation and documentation.

Data were collected from as many as 312 photos through in-depth observation and documentation, namely taking photos with a Nikon D3000 digital camera and a mobile phone camera. Data collection in the form of photos follows the following criteria: 1) all writings or marker objects in all land transportation modes that have written language; 2) writing is large enough and easy to read from the outside; 3) some of the same

data will only be counted one. For example, the following signs will not be counted: 1) photographs consisting of only numbers, place and person names, object names, and trademarks; 2) minimal writing on the back of a window or door and difficult to read from the outside; 3) writing that is partially erased or damaged or torn. All types of data in this study are primary data taken directly from the source. The data source is in the form of writings contained in the land transportation mode that passes through the Kupang terminal in the Lai-Lai Besi Kopan village. The location for data collection is Kupang for one week in August 2021. This article specifically focuses on language in the written form seen on land transportation modes such as trucks, pickups, buses, and *bemo* in Kupang, which aims to explore symbolic functions, particularly discursive constructs, by the preference for linguistic codes.

Data were analyzed with a critical discourse analysis model.

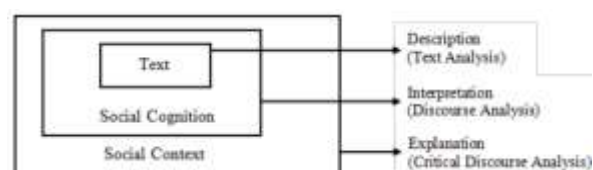


Figure 1. Model of CDA (adopted from Fairclough & Wodak, 1997; van Dijk, 2001)

Three paradigms have been applied in exploring the symbolic function, 1) the positive-empirical paradigm that focuses on analyzing the form of language, the sign of the text; 2) a constructive paradigm that focuses on analyzing the meaning of signs as a discursive construction, which is a representation of social cognition; and 3) critical paradigm, which explores discursive constructs through linguistic code preferences and their relation to social contexts including social knowledge and social power (Fairclough & Wodak, 1997; Van Dijk, 2001).

The discourse analysis model is divided into three: textual dimension or microstructure (Fairclough, 2003; van Dijk, 1997; Fairclough & Wodak, 1997). The microstructure refers to the meaning of discourse observable by analyzing the choice of words, sentences, propositions, clauses, and styles by individuals or particular communities, which van Dijk refers to as something concrete.

## FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

This research discusses the form and symbolic function of the quotes on land transportation modes around Kupang. This section presents the findings qualitatively. This study collected 312 pieces of data, which were divided based on the language use and the linguistic unit.

### The language of land transportation

The study found eight languages used by drivers; or owners of land transportation in Kupang, Indonesian, English, Uab Meto (Dawan), Kupang Malay, Betawi dialect, Rote, Sabu, Latin, Hebrew, mixed language, and so on. More details are available in the following table.

Table 1: Language used on bemo in Kupang

NO	Name of Language	Total	Percentage
1	English	134	42,9
2	Indonesia	103	33,1
3	Kupang Malay	8	2,6
4	Uab Meto (Dawan)	6	1,9
5	Rote	2	0,6
6	Sabu	3	1
6	Hebrew	3	1
7	Latin	1	0,3
8	Betawi	3	1
9	Other	26	8,3
10	Mix	23	7,3
<b>TOTAL DATA</b>		<b>312</b>	<b>100</b>

The data in table 1 shows that English still dominates the use of language in public spaces, especially on transportation around Kupang. Mixed language refers to the language combination, such as *my trip*, *maitua yang ator*. In comparison, the category of other languages refers to writing other than these languages because it can be considered slang, such as *X-treme* and *X-clusive*.

English or other foreign languages in public spaces, especially on land transportation in Kupang, is not related to the language of any ethnic group in Kupang. The dominant use of English in land transportation in Kupang shows the ideological and international values of the sign maker. The use of English contrasts with the sociolinguistic situation of Kupang, where we can easily find non-English speakers or at least diaspora people. So, the presence of English in public space, especially in land transportation, seems

only to want to accommodate the demands of the times and not to answer the language needs of society.

There may be benefits and drawbacks to using English or other foreign languages on signage in public areas. Because it is a free medium for English teaching and learning, the usage of English is perceived advantageous. In addition, it is viewed as the availability of natural learning resources in education, particularly at schools (Huebner, 2016; Ferrarotti, 2017; Gorter et al., 2021). At the linguistic level, students' exploration of signs in LL can contribute to increasing their awareness of lexical borrowing, syntactic patterns, phonological adaptations, and rhetorical devices, such as assonance, alliteration, metaphor, and personification, and can lead to further discussion regarding the purpose and effects of code-switching and hybrid language. Students can also use LL as a tool to investigate issues related to identity and ethnicity. Finally, at the macro level, students can research related to language policy, whether it is accurate or not.

From a business standpoint, there are apparent benefits associated with product promotion. English is considered more respectable and high quality (Liu, 2015; Onofri et al., 2013). It sparks discussion, yet studies from the past support it. The usage of English, on the other hand, led to the marginalization of regional tongues. It is a considerable loss when English is promoted in public settings at the expense of local culture, including languages.

The existence of several ethnic languages, although they do not dominate, in Kupang on public transportation shows that local identity is still maintained. Artawa et al. (2020) said that the easiest way to make local languages visible to the public is by using language and characters on outdoor signs. Thus, the use of language in the public sphere is not only a way to show the ideology and power of a language but also an effort to maintain the language (Wang & Xu, 2018). This understanding, in general, suggested a reciprocal relationship between the vitality of the local language in everyday life and its visibility in the public space. It means that signs in public spaces have a strong influence on the use of language.

### The linguistic form of quotes on transportation in Kupang City

The languages used in transportation modes in the city of Kupang consist of various linguistic units, words, phrases, clauses or sentences, and acronyms. Some of the data collected show some words or phrases but with different writing styles, for example, *p47en*. Even so, it still counts as a word because it refers to its meaning.

Table 2: language unit on land transportation

NO	Language unit	Total	Percentage
1	Word	138	38,5
2	Phrase	87	19,7
3	Clause or sentence	39	18,7
4	Acronym	48	23,1
<b>TOTAL</b>		<b>312</b>	<b>100</b>

Table 2 shows quantitative data from the linguistic unit used. Again, words dominate in the linguistic unit category. Each category of the linguistic unit will be described in detail in this section.

#### Word

The words in these data consist of essential words, affixes, repeated words, and compound words. The languages used are English, for example, *speed*, *haters*, *greenday*; Indonesian, for example, *ganteng*, *penguasa*; Kupang Malay, such as *basayang* (love each other), Uab Meto (Dawan language), for example, *tetus* (blessing) and *oehonis* (water of life); Hebrew, for example, *shalom* (peace), and other languages, i.e., categories of languages that appear with different and unique writing styles such as *p47en* and *p27den* which can be read by *pasien* (patient) and *presiden* (president). There are also words like *X-clusive*, which can be read as *exclusive*. Affixed words are only found in Indonesian and Kupang Malay.

In terms of numbers, English still ranks number one, followed by Indonesian and other languages. But, interestingly, there found also a local language, the Dawan language, that the speakers call Uab Meto. This language appears six times with different writings and meanings.

More details about the number of languages can be seen in the following table.

Table 3: language unit of word

No	Language	Total	Percentage
1	English	63	45,65
2	Indonesia	53	38,41
3	Uab Meto (Dawan)	6	4,36
4	Kupang Malay	1	0,71
5	Rote	2	1,45
6	Sabu	3	2,17
5	Slang/others	10	7,25
	<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>138</b>	<b>100</b>

#### Phrase

The phrase refers to the group of words that form a grammatical unit. Phrases do not contain a finite verb or have a subject and predicate structure. There are only three languages in this category: Indonesian, English, and Kupang Malay. As in the word category, the linguistic unit of this phrase is still dominated by English.

Table 4: language unit of phrase

No	Language	Total	Percentage
1	Indonesia	28	31,7
2	English	42	56,1
3	Kupang Malay	8	9,8
	<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>87</b>	<b>100</b>

English still dominates in this linguistic form. Generally, the phrases used are noun phrases, such as *the king*, *the protector*, *one girl*, or *the beautiful mama*. Phrases in Indonesian are still widely used and generally used in truck and pickup transportation, such as *sang guru* or *cewek Amarasi*, while English is primarily found in *bemo*. In addition, the Kupang Malay language appears in the writings of the pickup and *bemo*, such as *batikung tajam* and *maitua sablah rumah*.

#### Clause and sentence

The research data show that there are 39 clauses or sentences. The languages used are English, Indonesian, Kupang Malay, and Indonesian Betawi dialects like *nggak 191ada loe*, *nggak asyik*. There is also an expression in Latin, *ora et labora*, which means to pray and work. It is categorized as clauses or mixed sentences, namely the existence of code-mixing, for example, *my trip maitua yang ator* 'my trip is arranged by my partner (wife/girlfriend),' which is a mixture of English and Kupang Malay or *loe gue end*, which is a combination of Betawi dialect and English which means "you and I are over."

Table 5: language unit of clause and sentence

NO	Language	Total	Percentage
1	Indonesia	9	23,1
2	English	22	56,4
3	Kupang Malay	2	5,1
4	Betawi	2	5,1
5	Latin	1	2,6
6	Mix	3	7,7
<b>TOTAL</b>		<b>39</b>	<b>100</b>

Figures 5 and 6 below show the use of sentences in the mode of transportation in Kupang. The Indonesian language used tends to be more formal and standard. In this category, English still dominates, such as the sentences *I Love You*, *Jesus is the King*, and others.



Figure 4



Figure 5

Figure 4-5: sample of the use of clause and sentence

### Acronym

Acronyms are one of the categories that grab people’s attention and are often used as humorous material and can also be used as criticism or satire against one party. This acronym is formed from a word or phrase that already exists and has its meaning, and then the length differs from the actual meaning.

Table 6: language unit of the acronym

No	Language	Total	Percentage
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1	Indonesia	39	81,3
2	English	4	8,3
3	Mix language	5	10,4
<b>TOTAL</b>		<b>48</b>	<b>100</b>

The formation of the acronym does not follow a particular pattern, but it is adjusted to the sentence or meaning and purpose to be made. For example, *jagung bose*, which refers to the traditional Timorese food, is corn that has been shelled out through the process of being ground and then cooked, but the extension is *jangan ganggu botong orang soe* “don’t disturb us (from) Soe.”



Figure 6: samples of the use of the acronym on bemo

The formation pattern to taking certain syllables and letters to make their length. Another example is shy, where the first two syllables become the first syllable and the last syllable becomes the final syllable in the sentence, which is the past player. Making this acronym shows the creativity of the maker’s language.

This category consisted of 48 data. The language that dominated this category is Indonesian. The mixed acronym form categories in the data are words or letters which are an abbreviation of the names of certain groups or teams, for example, *BRT* “*Bintang Racing Team*,” or an English word such as *PROMOTER* “*PROfessional, Modern, and TERpercaya*.” There are no local languages in this category.

**Symbolic Function of quotes on land transportation**

The quotes are presented according to the theme, which are love, religion, music, and power. The following are examples of these themes:

1. Love: *Cinta itu seperti angin, kau bisa tak bisa melihatnya tapi kau bisa merasakannya; kenapa kamu berubah saat aku sudah sayang banget sama kamu?; basayang; kangen* and so on. Love is not only for young people but also for God, for example *I Love Jesus*, and also parents, for example *Kasih Bunda* and *father's love*.



Figure 7. Sample love theme

2. Religion: *Syalom; Ora et labora; berkat; Jesus is my boss; Imanuel; I love Jesus*. This theme is available in English, Indonesian, Dawan language, Greek, and Latin. However, English dominates the language used in these writings.



Figure 8: samples of religious theme

3. Music: *music is life; musique: Gak Goyak gak asyik; play music, slow rock*, etc. This theme is typical for young people and is generally written in stickers or ready-made writing. Vehicle owners only buy and install it as a vehicle decoration.
4. Power: *Tuan tanah; bos kici; bapa raja; Jesus is my boss*; etc.



Figure 9: sample of the theme of power

5. Family: *the big 32 Family, my trip maitua yang ator; ISIS: Istri semok, Idaman para Suami. Father love*, dll. The written language related to this theme is more likely about the family or relatives.
6. Regional theme: *nona Amarasi; nona Lembata; Jagung bose: jangan ganggu botong orang Soe; Laskar Helong, Puluthie* dll. This theme is specifically regional or expresses the identity of any product or the origin of someone or something.

The discussion above focuses on the symbolic function of texts on land transportation around Kupang. Although some

of the visible and legible texts contain elements of jokes, they still have a symbolic function. Furthermore, these texts show power relations and identity based on the data.

#### *Power relations*

The quotes on transportation contain a function of power, a hegemony of men (husbands) over women (wives). Texts such as *ISIS: Itri Semok Idaman Suami* represents love only as deep as the pragmatism of the erotica of love. Women are commodified; they are considered weak and always become victims of love. On the other hand, texts like *my trip maitua yang ator* indicate the other way around. This text shows the control of the *maitua* (the woman, i.e., boyfriend or wife) over the man wherever he goes. Another example of a power relationship is between the author of the text and God, as in the text, *Jesus is my boss*.

The actual data do not indicate the government's hegemony over society. Instead, it can lead to ambiguous interpretations, showing the public's ignorance or sign makers towards the government, repressive action, or satisfaction with its performance.

#### *Identity marker*

The use of language can show one's identity. A religious text represents the writer as an adherent of a particular religion. It shows their religious identity (Tunliu et al., 2022). The local languages of East Nusa Tenggara are found in minimal numbers (six) Uab Meto (Dawan language), Rote (one), and Kupang Malay (12). Uab Meto is the mother tongue of the Atoin Meto tribe on the island of Timor and is often read in literature as the Dawan language (Benu, 2022), while Rote is the mother tongue of the Rote tribe. Kupang Malay is a creole language that they have used over time and generations, yet youths longer master the use of their ancestral language.

Globalization is one of the reasons for the spread of the English language, which is commonly used in economics related to markets, production, and consumption. Using English aims to increase sales, thus motivating them for economic reasons (Shen, 2022). This situation is not the same as in multilingual cities, such as Singapore (Lee, 2020), where English is one of the native languages. In a

multi-language city such as Kupang, the use of English raises issues of identity and power, leading to the imbalance between language differences in multilingual situations. At the same time, the use of English is associated with values, such as international orientation, modernity, success, luxury, or pleasure (Takhtarova et al., 2015; Nenotek & Benu, 2022; Purnanto et al., 2022; Shen, 2022; Paramarta et al., 2022). Every language is a symbol of the speaker's identity. Local languages found on public transportation in Kupang, such as Kupang Malay, Dawan, Rote, or Sabu are symbols of the local identity. Therefore, those languages must always be preserved and continuously maintained.

## **CONCLUSION**

This study concluded that languages in the public space of Kupang city, especially those on land transportation, are linguistically multilingual. It shows the characteristics of the people of Kupang city, which are multicultural, multiethnic, and multilingual. The existence of English shows an effort to exhibit oneself as a global citizen while depicting the hegemony of English over Indonesian and local languages. It leads to the conclusion that written language on land transportation modes in Kupang functions as the power of self or group identity. The linguistic signs of written language in public settings, especially on land transportation, serve as symbolic indicators of power and status. Additionally, these signs shed light on the neighborhood's social customs and ideological perspectives.

The result of the study shows that English has become a language of nowadays culture. It leads to the idea that it can benefit language learners. The written English language can be used as authentic materials for English classrooms. This idea needs further research to examine how it works. It is also necessary to conduct additional research to see how the community will react to the presence of English and how it threatens the survival of the regional languages.

The written language on land transportation may have been randomly or unintentionally placed, but it generally describes the author. It aims to satisfy the needs and expectations of the target audience,



particularly the younger generation. However, it is advised that they refrain from using English for public transportation quotes to

maintain the local language because the condition is problematic for our local identity.

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