

Linguistic landscape of culinary businesses in Palopo

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Abstract

This study investigates the linguistic landscape of the culinary business in Palopo Town, South Sulawesi Province, Indonesia, addressing the limited research on smaller urban contexts with distinct local languages and commercial dynamics. The research aims to identify the most frequently used languages in culinary signboards and to explore the motivations behind these linguistic choices. Employing a qualitative approach, data were collected through field observation in October 2025, resulting in 20 photographed culinary signboards. The analysis used the interactive model, involving data reduction, categorization based on language composition and communicative function, and sociolinguistic interpretation. The findings reveal four categories: monolingual English (40%), monolingual Indonesian or local languages (30%), bilingual (15%), and multilingual (5%). English is predominantly associated with modernity and global identity, while Indonesian and local languages signal cultural closeness and authenticity. Most business names are non-clausal nominal phrases, emphasizing brevity and branding efficiency. The results demonstrate that language choice in Palopo's culinary signage functions not only as identification but also as a strategic tool for identity representation, market positioning, and negotiation between global and local values in public space.

Keywords

culinary business, linguistic landscape, Luwu Raya, Palopo

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Introduction

The concept of the linguistic landscape has evolved from being a simple observation of written language in public areas to a complex exploration of how language interacts with identity, ideology, and power. Foundational studies have established linguistic landscapes as a vital part of sociolinguistic inquiry, showing that written texts in public spaces can reveal much about social hierarchies and multilingual realities (Backhaus, 2006; Shohamy & Gorter 2008; Shohamy, et al., 2010). Later developments in this field expanded the focus to include the visual, spatial, and multimodal aspects of signage.

Linguistic landscape serves as a rich medium to understand the interaction between language, space, and society. Studies on the *linguistic landscape* are important because they reveal multilingual dynamics in daily life and demonstrate how language is used for economic, political, and cultural purposes (Ivkovic & Lotherington, 2009; Agbaglo & Afful, 2023). The language function in everyday life that can be seen in the linguistic landscape of culinary spaces offers valuable insights. Signboards in eateries and cafes serve as a tool of identification or promotion, and also act as a visible representation of cultural identity through language choice. The diversity of languages displayed in these spaces not only functions as a tool for communication but also represents cultural identity, ideology, and social relations within a community (Pütz & Mundt, 2018).

Recent studies on culinary and urban linguistic landscapes have documented language choice, multimodality, and commercial motivations across cities and other regional centres, revealing common patterns of bilingualism, youth-oriented signage, and tourism-driven language use. Chinese restaurants in Sydney's Hurstville reveal visible language tracks changing community demographics and commercial competition (Xu & Wang, 2021), while Thai restaurants in Hamburg show how sign genres and the functions of languages work together (Androutsopoulos & Chowchong, 2021). In elite coffee/food spaces in Hong Kong and Singapore, Chinese is commodified as a marked, nostalgic, and exclusive resource (Theng & Lee, 2022). In a Saudi tourist city, restaurant outdoor signs and menus may diverge (Hazaea et al., 2024).

Studies in Indonesia illustrate a global-local layering of the culinary linguistic landscape. Food advertisements in Makassar show English dominance tied to promotion and branding (Nirwana & Sharma, 2022), and restaurant signage in Ubud, Bali, frequently combines Balinese/Indonesian with English as a pragmatic and symbolic strategy in a tourist economy (Artawa et al., 2023). Another study adds that signage can be designed to strengthen cultural awareness and visitor experience by balancing Indonesian/English with local scripts (Purnawati et al., 2025). Large-scale culinary signboard evidence from Kupang, reinforces that culinary linguistic landscape can serve as a public display of multicultural identity (Benu et al., 2025). Most of these works focus on tourist or large urban contexts and do not examine mid-size cities with distinct local languages and commercial structures.

Palopo is an administrative town in South Sulawesi Province, Indonesia. It is known as an important center for trade, education, and government in the Luwu Raya. Palopo has a rich historical background, as it was once part of the ancient Luwu Kingdom, one of the oldest kingdoms in South Sulawesi (Kota Palopo, 2026). The town is also recognized for its cultural diversity, natural surroundings, and strategic position connecting several regencies in the region. Palopo's demographic and economic profile shows a mid-size city context with specific market dynamics that likely shape signage choices differently.

The main objectives of this study are to identify the languages most frequently used in culinary business signage and to explore the motivations behind these linguistic choices. The rationale behind this research stems from the need to understand the interaction between language and

society in smaller urban contexts. This study contributes to the broader discussion of multilingualism and linguistic representation. It also offers insights for entrepreneurs and educators interested in how language use can support local branding and cultural preservation.

Method

This study applied a qualitative approach to identify the behavior, perspectives, experiences, and perceptions regarding the linguistic landscape of culinary signboards. The data for this research focus on photographs of the signboards of culinary businesses in Palopo Town. Each photograph functions as a data unit representing the linguistic element displayed. The photographs of the signboards were taken by the researchers through convenience sampling in October 2025. The total number of signboards is 20 from permanent shops/buildings of culinary businesses.

The data analysis followed the interactive model (Miles et al., 2014). In the first stage, data reduction, all collected photos were reviewed and selected based on clarity and relevance to the research focus. In the second stage, data display, the photos were categorized into analytical units according to language composition (monolingual, bilingual, or multilingual), linguistic structure, and communicative meaning and function (informational or symbolic). The interpretation is grounded in the framework of Linguistic Landscape theory, particularly as conceptualized by Shohamy and Gorter (2008) and Shohamy et al. (2010), which view public signage as a symbolic construction of social space. Finally, in the conclusion drawing stage, the researcher interpreted the patterns and sociolinguistic implications of language use in the culinary spaces of Palopo Town.

Results

Based on the research findings, there are twenty culinary business names identified in this linguistic landscape study. These names are categorized into four language types: monolingual English (40%), monolingual Indonesian or local (30%), bilingual (15%), and multilingual (5%). Each datum reflects unique linguistic choices and communicative purposes. From the visual aspect (photo), the names often use modern typography and color to attract attention. In terms of language choice, English tends to represent modernity and global identity, while Indonesian or local languages show cultural closeness and authenticity. The word and sentence structure vary from single nouns like *Locals* to longer descriptive phrases such as *Warung Coto Mangkasara*.

Table 1. Linguistic landscape categories of culinary business in Palopo

Categories	Total	Percentage
Monolingual (English)	8	40%
Monolingual (Indonesian/local languages)	6	30%
Bilingual (English + Indonesian/local languages)	3	15%
Multilingual (more than two languages)	1	5%
Total	20	100%

The meaning of each name conveys different impressions—ranging from simplicity and warmth to exclusivity and innovation. The displayed identity reveals how business owners position themselves as either modern, traditional, or hybrid brands. The information or message delivered through these names is not merely about food but also about the brand's cultural

identity and target audience, showing how linguistic choice becomes part of marketing and identity representation in the local culinary landscape.

The monolingual category, consisting of business names such as *Richeese Factory*, *The Icon*, *McDonald's*, *Social Barn*, *Nineroom*, *Enzyme*, *Locals*, *Finare*, *Bakso Lumayan*, *Warung Tunggal Rasa*, *Pawon Panjalu*, *Sido Mampir*, *Lesehan Lela*, and *Manakala*, shows a clear linguistic focus using either English or Indonesian consistently. Structurally, most of these names are minor phrases or nominal groups, rather than full sentences; they do not include verbs, so they are non-clausal and function as simple noun phrases. None of them uses formal sentence structures, active or passive voice—rather, they rely on concise lexical items to represent the brand.



Figure 1. Monolingual culinary business

The meanings of these names vary: *Richeese Factory* suggests “a place producing rich cheese-based products,” *Social Barn* implies “a friendly social gathering spot,” *Locals* highlights “a place for local people,” and *Bakso Lumayan* means “fairly good meatballs,” which conveys modesty and everyday familiarity. Meanwhile, *Sido Mampir* (Javanese) means “stop by,” inviting consumers informally, and *Warung Tunggal Rasa* expresses “one unique taste,” emphasizing quality and unity. The theme across these names revolves around culinary identity and customer experience. Some highlight the type of food (*Bakso*, *Richeese*), others emphasize the business image (*The Icon*, *Finare*), while a few focus on consumer engagement or atmosphere (*Locals*, *Sido Mampir*). Overall, the monolingual names project simplicity, memorability, and either global or cultural identity through brief yet meaningful lexical expressions.

The bilingual category includes *Warunk Bukan Resto*, *Tuuk Eatery*, and *Bebek Sanjay*, which combine elements of Indonesian or local language with English or regional words. Structurally, all three names are minor phrases, not full sentences, and they do not contain verbs; therefore, they are non-formal, non-clausal constructions rather than active or passive sentences. The mixture of languages reflects a hybrid linguistic identity, aiming to connect local authenticity with a sense of modernity.



Figure 2. Bilingual culinary business

The meaning of each name is contextually symbolic: *Warunk Bukan Resto* literally means “a small shop, not a restaurant,” expressing a humorous and casual tone that attracts younger consumers while emphasizing simplicity. *Tuuk Eatery* blends the local or personal term *Tuuk* (which may refer to a name or local concept) with the English *Eatery*, meaning “a place to eat,” signifying cultural fusion and a contemporary dining experience. Meanwhile, *Bebek Sanjay* combines the Indonesian word *Bebek* (duck) with *Sanjay*, a regional or personal name, suggesting a local specialty or owner’s identity. The theme carried by these bilingual names centres on culinary identity and cultural hybridity, balancing local pride with global appeal. Their focus is primarily on the business identity and culinary branding, rather than on consumer phrases, using creative linguistic mixing to make the brand stand out as both familiar and modern in the competitive culinary landscape.

The multilingual type in this research is represented by *Warung Coto Mangkasara*, which combines Indonesian and regional Makassarese linguistic elements. The name integrates three layers of language and culture, those are: *Warung* (Indonesian, meaning “small eatery”), *Coto* (Makassarese traditional soup), and *Mangkasara* (a local ethnonym referring to Makassar). Structurally, this brand name forms a minor nominal phrase; it is not a full sentence and does not follow formal, active, or passive grammatical patterns. Instead, it functions as a descriptive lexical combination, identifying the place and its culinary specialty simultaneously.



Figure 3. Multilingual culinary business

The meaning of the brand name literally conveys “a small shop serving Makassarese Coto,” emphasizing both the dish and its regional origin. The theme presented is deeply tied to local cultural identity and traditional cuisine, showing pride in heritage and authenticity. The focus of this multilingual name is primarily on the food itself and its ethnic background, positioning the business as a cultural ambassador of Makassar through its language use. In essence, the mixture of national and regional linguistic elements reinforces the restaurant’s image as a genuine local culinary destination while maintaining accessibility for broader audiences familiar with the Indonesian term *warung*.

Discussion

The linguistic landscape of culinary businesses in Palopo shows a dominant pattern of monolingual language use, particularly English and Indonesian or local languages. English appears frequently to represent modernity and global orientation, while Indonesian and local languages convey familiarity and cultural closeness. Bilingual and multilingual signs appear in smaller numbers and function as hybrid forms that combine local identity with contemporary or international appeal. Structurally, most business names are non-clausal nominal phrases rather than complete sentences, emphasizing brevity, memorability, and branding efficiency. These patterns indicate that language choice in culinary signage is strategically designed to communicate both the type of cuisine and the desired brand image within an increasingly modern urban environment.

The language practices in Palopo’s culinary signage reflect cultural identity through the use of Indonesian and local languages that signal tradition, authenticity, and community belonging, while English functions as a marker of modernity, prestige, and economic ambition. From an economic perspective, English and bilingual naming strategies are employed to enhance marketability, attract broader consumer groups, and position businesses competitively within a growing commercial sector. Socially, the coexistence of global and local languages demonstrates how business owners negotiate identity and value in public space, using language not only as a communicative tool but also as a symbolic resource that expresses aspiration, inclusivity, and Palopo’s evolving image as a modern yet culturally rooted city.

The findings of this study resonate strongly with Shohamy et al. (2010) conceptualization of the linguistic landscape as a symbolic construction of public space in which language choices reflect power relations, identity negotiation, and socio-economic aspirations. The dominance of monolingual English and Indonesian names in Palopo’s culinary signage illustrates how global and national languages function as markers of modernity, legitimacy, and market orientation, aligning with Shohamy et al.’s argument that public signs are not neutral but ideological representations of social actors’ intentions. The use of concise nominal phrases rather than full clauses supports the idea that signage prioritizes visibility, memorability, and symbolic impact over grammatical completeness, reinforcing branding and identity construction in urban space.

Meanwhile, the presence of bilingual and multilingual names such as *Warunk Bukan Resto* and *Warung Coto Mangkasara* exemplifies how linguistic landscapes become arenas of negotiation between global prestige and local authenticity. In this sense, the culinary signs in Palopo function not merely as informational labels but as deliberate identity statements that reflect the city’s positioning within processes of globalization while simultaneously maintaining cultural rootedness—precisely the dynamic interplay between language, space, and social meaning emphasized in the book of *Linguistic Landscape in the City* (Shohamy et al., 2010).

The findings of this research are in line with the results of some previous studies. A study showing that English and Indonesian dominate the linguistic landscape of culinary businesses in

Surakarta (Purnanto et al., 2021). The study revealed that English is often used to convey modernity and prestige, while Indonesian reflects local and cultural identity. Research on Makassar's food advertisements highlights how language choice on signboards reflects marketing strategies and consumer appeal (Nirwana & Sharma, 2022). It shows that English is predominantly used as a promotional tool and a marker of modernity and business identity.

Another study has focused on Japanese culinary businesses in urban areas in Malang (Devina et al., 2024). The study concludes that the use of Japanese language elements plays a significant role in attracting customers and strengthening the cultural authenticity and branding of the businesses. The next linguistic landscape research in tourism areas in Tawangmangu reveals the dominance of local culinary representations in public spaces (Sudarmanto et al., 2024). The research highlights the role of signboards as both commercial media and cultural markers in public space. Then, the result of the culinary signboard study in Kupang, reinforces that culinary linguistic landscape can serve as a public display of multicultural identity (Benu et al., 2025).

There is also one previous linguistic landscape research conducted in Palopo. The study discusses the proportion signs in several public places and along the main roads in the town based on monolingualism and bilingualism (Masruddin & Nur, 2026). The results of the study show that the linguistic landscape in public places in Palopo is dominated by Indonesian language. English is used more often than other foreign languages. Local language, as the mother tongue for most people in Palopo is rarely used in public places. These facts are comparable to the results of this current study.

The results of this linguistic landscape research indicate that Palopo has transformed into a modern city with a rapidly growing culinary scene, where the increasing use of English in business names reflects not only globalization and modern lifestyle influences but also the city's dynamic effort to present its local identity within an international context. Palopo has increasingly transformed into a modern and economically dynamic city, evidenced by steady economic growth and a significant contribution from trade, retail, and service sectors such as restaurants and hospitality. Fortunately, there is an effort to form a new autonomous region, the province of Luwu Raya, in which Palopo will be the central city of the province.

In 2024, Palopo's Gross Regional Domestic Product (GRDP) reached around IDR 11.08 trillion with a growth of about 4.40 % compared to the previous year, and wholesale and retail trade, including culinary businesses, was the largest contributor to the local economy, highlighting the expanding commercial environment in the city center (BPS Kota Palopo, 2024). This socio-economic context supports the observation that the increasing use of English in culinary business signboards not only reflects globalization and modern lifestyle influences but also represents Palopo's efforts to project its local identity within an international framework, where English serves both commercial and symbolic functions in public space.

Despite offering insights into the linguistic landscape of culinary businesses in Palopo, this research has several limitations. First, the data are limited to a relatively small number of culinary business signboards, which may not fully represent the broader diversity of language use across different districts or types of culinary establishments in the city. Second, the analysis primarily focuses on written linguistic elements and does not include an in-depth investigation of visual semiotics, consumer perceptions, or business owners' motivations behind language choice. In addition, the study does not examine changes over time, which could reveal shifting linguistic trends in response to economic or tourism development.

Conclusion

The linguistic landscape of culinary businesses in Palopo reflects a dynamic interaction between language, culture, and modernity. This study reveals that English, Indonesian, and local languages coexist in business naming practices, each serving different symbolic and communicative purposes. English is used to express modernity and global orientation, while Indonesian and local languages emphasize cultural identity, familiarity, and local pride. The distribution of monolingual, bilingual, and multilingual signage demonstrates how entrepreneurs strategically use language to attract customers and represent their brand image. The linguistic landscape of Palopo's culinary scene illustrates the town's transformation into a modern urban center that embraces globalization while maintaining strong cultural roots.

The local government of Palopo should develop language policies and urban branding strategies that both support globalization and protect local linguistic heritage. Entrepreneurs are advised to adopt strategic multilingual naming practices that not only enhance modern and global appeal through English, but also strengthen emotional connection and cultural authenticity by incorporating Indonesian and local languages. The people of Palopo should actively support businesses that value local identity, fostering pride in regional language and culture while remaining open to global influences.

Language education institutions should play a strategic role in raising students' awareness of the sociolinguistic functions of language in public spaces, including how English, Indonesian, and local languages shape identity and modernity in the linguistic landscape. Future researchers are encouraged to expand the data set by including more signage, menus, and digital advertisements, employ mixed methods such as interviews or surveys, and conduct longitudinal or comparative studies with other cities to gain a more comprehensive understanding of how linguistic landscapes evolve and reflect social, cultural, and economic dynamics.

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