

Reclaiming indigenous voices: linguistic landscape of minority languages in urban public spaces in Indonesia

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ABSTRACT

Background: The visibility of minority languages in Indonesia's urban public spaces reflects complex dynamics of cultural identity, political recognition, and linguistic equity. **Objective:** This study aims to examine the distribution, symbolic meanings, and power relations embedded in the linguistic landscape of selected Indonesian cities. **Method:** Employing a qualitative design that integrates Linguistic Landscape Analysis, semiotics, and Critical Discourse Analysis, data were collected through photographic documentation, field observations, municipal policy reviews, and stakeholder interviews. **Results:** The findings show that Makassar, Bandung, and Kupang exhibit high-visibility and institutionally supported minority language signage, integrating cultural identity with commercial and governance domains. Jayapura's linguistic presence is dominated by political assertion and artistic expression, while Jakarta and Surabaya show lower visibility, with indigenous languages often confined to informal or peripheral spaces. These patterns indicate that ethnolinguistic vitality, governance frameworks, and socio-political histories strongly influence language placement, symbolic resonance, and public legitimacy. **Implication:** The study implies that sustainable indigenous language visibility requires not only spatial representation but also systemic policy support and community engagement. **Novelty:** This study demonstrates how governance structures and ethnolinguistic vitality jointly shape the visibility and symbolic power of minority languages in urban Indonesia through an integrated linguistic landscape, semiotic, and critical discourse perspective.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Urban public spaces in Indonesia are saturated with competing scripts—Bahasa Indonesia, global English, and a mosaic of regional tongues—making the linguistic landscape a crucial site for observing whose voices are visible and whose are sidelined. In rapidly urbanizing hubs like Makassar, Surabaya, Bandung, Jakarta, Jayapura, Kupang, and Ende, signage does not merely label; it signals belonging, market targeting, and governance priorities [1], [2]. Minority languages on shopfronts, murals, and municipal boards can index cultural pride, commercial niche-making, or political recognition, while their absence hints at assimilation pressures and symbolic erasure. Examining Bugis store names, Sundanese branding, Minang graffiti, and Papuan murals alongside bilingual government notices exposes how identities are negotiated under national monolingual norms and neoliberal aesthetics. This study is urgent because visibility in the city confers status, resources, and legitimacy; mapping and interpreting these displays reveal how linguistic justice, cultural rights, and urban citizenship are negotiated in everyday streetscapes.

Scholarship on linguistic landscapes has established how signage constructs social reality, mediates power, and reflects language policy [3], [4], [5], [6]. Prior Indonesian-focused work documents bilingual or trilingual shop signs in tourism zones and heritage quarters, often emphasizing counts of language presence and top-down versus bottom-up authorship [5], [6], [7], [8]. Yet notable gaps remain: multi-city comparisons that include eastern Indonesia are rare; multimodal analyses that integrate Barthesian semiotics with critical discourse analysis are limited; and the intersection of local regulation, market branding, and minority language revitalization remains under-theorized. Studies seldom trace how graffiti and murals—ephemeral, bottom-up media—reconfigure indexical orders differently from formal signage [1], [9], [10]. Likewise, little is known about how municipal translations in Kupang or Ende align with actual language ecologies. By addressing these lacunae, this research extends beyond frequency counts to interpret meanings, power relations, and policy effects encoded in visual-linguistic forms.

This study asks three guiding questions. First, how are minority languages—such as Bugis in Makassar, Javanese/Madurese in Surabaya, Sundanese in greater Bandung, Minang in Jakarta’s Pasar Baru, and Papuan languages in Jayapura—distributed and patterned across sign types (shopfronts, graffiti/murals, public information boards)? Second, what denotative and connotative meanings emerge when words, images, logos, and color schemes are read through Roland Barthes’s semiotics, and how do these meanings index authenticity, locality, or commodification? Third, using critical discourse analysis, how do top-down municipal signs and bottom-up citizen displays reproduce or contest hierarchies between national and local codes, and what ideologies of modernity, order, and heritage do they project? Operationally, we combine systematic linguistic landscape mapping with semiotic close reading and CDA of regulatory texts and stakeholder interviews. The goal is to produce a theoretically integrated account linking spatial distribution to meaning-making and to the broader discursive politics of recognition.

This study argues that minority languages gain selective visibility where they can be commodified as “authentic” local flavor or leveraged for targeted publics, but remain constrained by national-language prestige and regulatory aesthetics that privilege uniformity. LLA will likely show clustered bottom-up vitality around markets and community hubs, while semiotic analysis reveals how local scripts connote heritage or trendiness depending on typographic and visual framing. CDA is expected to uncover policy ambivalence: some municipalities celebrate diversity via translations, yet signage bylaws and branding campaigns normalize Bahasa Indonesia and sanitized design, marginalizing grassroots inscriptions like graffiti. These findings imply that visibility alone is not equality; without supportive policy and community ownership, minority languages risk being reduced to decorative tokens. The study thus tests the claim that equitable urban multilingualism requires aligning planning, commerce, and cultural rights, informing language policy, inclusive placemaking, and education for sustained language maintenance.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1. Language visibility and symbolic representation

The concept of the *linguistic landscape* (LL) captures the ways in which languages appear and are made visible in public spaces, functioning both as communicative tools and as symbolic representations of identity. LL is defined as the visibility and salience of written language on public and commercial signs within a given territory [11]. From a symbolic standpoint, signs operate as markers of social presence, cultural recognition, and power hierarchies. Scholars diverge in their interpretations: the *narrow approach* confines LL to textual content and frequency counts [6], [12], whereas the *broad approach* incorporates multimodal elements, spatial positioning, and socio-political context [7], [13], [14]. This broader view frames LL as a cultural and ideological phenomenon, making it crucial for understanding how minority languages in Indonesia’s urban public spaces serve not only to communicate information but also to reclaim cultural voice and assert identity in a predominantly national-language environment.

Within LL theory, several analytical dimensions help conceptualize how languages function in public signage [15], [16], [17], [18]. One widely recognized distinction is between *top-down* signage—produced by authorities, institutions, and official bodies—and *bottom-up* signage—generated by private individuals, communities, or grassroots actors. Another dimension is *linguistic composition*, which categorizes signage as monolingual, bilingual, or multilingual, revealing degrees of inclusivity and contact among languages. *Language order* and *script prominence* highlight power asymmetries by indicating which languages are given priority in visual hierarchy. *Materiality* differentiates between permanent and temporary signs, with implications for perceived legitimacy and authority. *Spatial distribution* sheds light on the geographic clustering or dispersal of languages, reflecting patterns of segregation or integration. In the context of Indonesian cities, these dimensions reveal whether Bugis, Javanese, Sundanese, Minang, or Papuan scripts appear as stable, institutionally supported presences or as ephemeral, localized expressions of cultural identity in contested linguistic space.

2.2. Meaning-making through text and visual codes

Semiotics provides a theoretical framework for analyzing how public signs communicate meaning beyond their literal content. Defined as the study of signs and sign systems [19], semiotics in LL research explores the interaction between language and other symbolic elements such as colors, typography, and imagery. Dondero (2024) distinguishes between *denotation*, the literal meaning of a sign, and *connotation*, the cultural and ideological associations that signs evoke [20]. Peircean semiotics adds further nuance by classifying signs as *icons*, *indexes*, and *symbols*, depending on their relationship to the referent. Different scholarly traditions emphasize different aspects: Barthes focuses on cultural and ideological reading, while Peirce highlights the structural relationship between sign and meaning. In the study of minority languages in Indonesia's urban spaces, semiotics allows for interpreting not only the presence of local scripts but also their aesthetic framing, emotional resonance, and ideological positioning in relation to national or global discourses.

From a semiotic perspective, public signage is a complex assembly of *semiotic resources*—elements that carry communicative potential. These include *visual codes* (typography, color schemes, iconography), *spatial codes* (placement of linguistic elements within the sign and the broader streetscape), and *linguistic codes* (choice of words, scripts, and language mixing). In Barthesian terms, signs may employ *anchorage*, where text directs the interpretation of imagery, or *relay*, where text and image collaborate to create meaning. In the context of minority languages, these semiotic resources index cultural identity, authenticity, and belonging. For example, a shop sign in Sundanese script might index local pride, while a Papuan mural could serve as a political statement of resistance. However, such indexicality can be double-edged: minority scripts may be commodified for aesthetic purposes in tourism branding without substantive community empowerment. Understanding these layers of meaning helps explain the role of signage in both preserving and reshaping cultural narratives.

2.3. Power, ideology, and language policy

Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) examines how language use reflects, reinforces, or challenges power structures and ideological formations [21], [22]. In the study of linguistic landscapes, CDA moves beyond counting occurrences of minority languages to interrogating the socio-political conditions that enable or limit their visibility. Competing definitions exist: Fairclough emphasizes a triadic model involving textual analysis, discursive practice, and sociocultural practice [21], while Wodak underscores the historical and political situatedness of discourse [23]. In multilingual Indonesia, where national language policy prioritizes Bahasa Indonesia yet regional autonomy laws recognize local languages, CDA becomes essential for unpacking tensions between symbolic recognition and structural marginalization. It can reveal whether minority language displays represent authentic empowerment or tokenistic gestures designed to satisfy multicultural ideals without altering underlying hierarchies. Thus, CDA frames LL analysis within the broader debates on language rights, cultural policy, and the politics of representation in public space.

The application of CDA to linguistic landscapes involves analyzing multiple layers of meaning-making. *Textual analysis* addresses the choice of vocabulary, syntax, and rhetorical devices in signage, revealing whether minority languages are framed as heritage assets, market commodities, or marginalized dialects. *Discursive practice analysis* considers who produces the signs, under what institutional or economic constraints, and how different audiences interpret them. *Sociocultural practice analysis* situates signage within the macro-context of political ideologies, economic development strategies, and historical narratives of linguistic hierarchy. Indicators such as *intertextuality*—how signs reference or echo other texts—and *interdiscursivity*—how commercial, cultural, and political discourses intersect—are particularly relevant in contested urban spaces. In Indonesia, these analytical dimensions illuminate how language display is mediated by governance structures, market logic, and identity politics, highlighting that reclaiming indigenous voices in public signage requires not only visual presence but also structural support for linguistic equity.

3. METHOD

The unit of analysis in this study is the visual-linguistic artifacts of minority languages displayed in urban public spaces across selected Indonesian cities. As shown in Table 1, these include textual and symbolic elements—words, phrases, logos, and culturally significant symbols—found in shop signs, billboards, public information boards, graffiti, murals, street advertisements, and government-issued signage. Examples comprise Bugis-language store names in Makassar, Javanese or Madurese shopfronts in Surabaya, Sundanese branding in greater Bandung, Minang graffiti in Jakarta's Pasar Baru, and Papuan-language murals in Jayapura, as well as bilingual public warnings in Kupang and Ende. The rationale for selecting these units is their role as semiotic indicators of cultural presence, identity assertion, and language vitality in

the urban sphere [6], [7]. By focusing on tangible, spatially located texts and symbols, the study addresses both the material visibility of minority languages and the socio-political narratives embedded in their design, placement, and linguistic choices.

Table 1. Unit analysis of research

Category	Description	Example Locations	Minority Language Examples
Commercial Signage	Shop names, banners, billboards using minority languages for branding or customer targeting.	Makassar, Surabaya, Bandung	Bugis, Javanese, Madurese, Sundanese
Public Information Boards	Government-issued notices, warnings, or instructions featuring minority language translations.	Kupang, Ende	Kupang Malay, local Austronesian languages
Graffiti and Murals	Street art incorporating minority language text as cultural or political expression.	Jayapura, Jakarta (Pasar Baru)	Papuan languages, Minang
Street Advertisements	Informal posters, flyers, and leaflets incorporating minority scripts or vocabulary.	Various urban markets	Local vernaculars adapted to city context
Government Signage	Official public signage reflecting bilingual or multilingual policy implementation.	Provincial capitals with regional autonomy status	Regional official languages alongside Bahasa Indonesia
Cultural Symbol Integration	Use of local scripts, motifs, and icons in design to evoke identity or heritage values.	Across all study sites	Script-based symbols from indigenous writing systems

This research adopts a qualitative design using a *linguistic ethnography* approach, which integrates the principles of linguistic landscape analysis with ethnographic sensitivity to context [24], [25]. This approach is appropriate because it allows for an in-depth examination of not only the textual-visual features of signage but also the cultural, historical, and political contexts in which these signs are produced and interpreted. Linguistic ethnography supports flexible, iterative observation that situates sign data within everyday social practices and power dynamics. Unlike purely quantitative LL studies that focus on counting language appearances, this qualitative approach privileges interpretive depth, capturing nuances of meaning, symbolism, and ideology. It is especially suited for minority language research in Indonesia, where local scripts and multilingual arrangements carry layered significance. The design enables the study to connect spatial patterns of language display with broader issues of cultural rights, urban governance, and identity negotiation.

This study draws on multiple sources of information to ensure a rich and triangulated dataset. Primary data come from photographic documentation of public signs featuring minority languages in selected urban locations. These are supplemented by fieldnotes on the physical and social contexts in which each sign appears, such as neighborhood demographics, adjacent businesses, and public activity patterns. Secondary sources include municipal regulations on signage, cultural heritage policies, and local language preservation initiatives, which provide insight into institutional frameworks influencing language display. Additional qualitative inputs come from semi-structured interviews with key informants, including shop owners, street artists, municipal officials, and community leaders, to capture their perspectives on language choice and design decisions. This multi-source strategy aligns with LL scholarship emphasizing the integration of visual data with contextual and stakeholder perspectives [26], ensuring that analysis reflects both the visible artifacts and the sociocultural forces shaping them.

Data collection follows a systematic yet context-sensitive procedure. First, selected urban areas are mapped to identify zones with a high likelihood of minority language presence, including cultural districts, traditional markets, and areas with significant migrant or indigenous populations. Photographic documentation is conducted using high-resolution equipment to capture both the textual details and surrounding context of each sign. Observational fieldnotes are recorded concurrently to describe environmental factors, audience interactions, and any situational cues relevant to interpretation. Where appropriate, brief on-site conversations with sign producers or users are conducted to clarify language choice and design intent. Municipal documents and policy texts are obtained through public records or local government offices. The process emphasizes ethical considerations, including consent for interviews and avoidance of sensitive political content in photography. This combination of systematic visual mapping and

ethnographic observation enables a comprehensive understanding of how minority languages are positioned and perceived in the urban linguistic landscape.

Data analysis proceeds in three interrelated stages, corresponding to the study’s theoretical frameworks. First, *linguistic landscape analysis* (LLA) is applied to categorize signs according to authorship type (top-down vs. bottom-up), linguistic composition, language order, and spatial distribution. Second, *semiotic analysis* based on Roland Barthes’s framework identifies denotative and connotative meanings, visual codes, and cultural symbolism embedded in sign design. Third, *critical discourse analysis* (CDA) following Fairclough’s three-dimensional model examines how language display relates to broader ideological, political, and policy contexts. Triangulation between these methods ensures both descriptive accuracy and interpretive depth. The outcome is an integrated account that links the physical presence of minority languages in public signage to their socio-political significance, revealing the interplay of visibility, meaning, and power in Indonesia’s urban multilingual spaces.

4. RESULTS

4.1. Linguistic landscape mapping and distribution

The minority language signage across six Indonesian urban sites are categorized by sign type. Table 2 mapping reveals differences in the prevalence and spatial concentration of local languages in both top-down and bottom-up signage. This dataset provides a measurable foundation for mapping spatial language visibility, showing clear urban differences in sign type dominance.

Table 2. Distribution of minority language signage by type and city

City	Commercial Signage	Public Info Boards	Graffiti/Murals	Street Ads/Leaflets	Government Signage
Makassar	38	12	5	8	10
Surabaya	22	7	3	5	8
Bandung	29	11	6	4	9
Jakarta	14	6	12	7	5
Jayapura	10	4	15	6	3
Kupang	8	14	2	3	12

Table 2 indicates that Makassar and Bandung display the highest number of minority-language commercial signs, reflecting their strong local business culture and linguistic pride, particularly in Bugis and Sundanese contexts. Jayapura, despite having fewer commercial signs, leads in graffiti and mural representation, suggesting a more grassroots, expressive mode of language display tied to political and cultural activism. Kupang shows an unusual dominance of public information boards and government signage in local languages, indicating a top-down policy emphasis on bilingual public communication. Jakarta’s high graffiti/mural count relative to its low commercial signage presence reflects the marginalized yet symbolically charged placement of Minang and Betawi dialects in informal art spaces. The table also suggests that in Surabaya, minority language presence is more evenly spread but generally lower in number, perhaps due to greater assimilation into dominant Javanese-Indonesian linguistic norms. Overall, patterns reveal distinct city-specific balances between institutional and grassroots visibility.

These patterns can be interpreted through the interplay of sociolinguistic vitality, policy frameworks, and urban cultural economies. Cities like Makassar and Bandung, where minority languages have high ethnolinguistic vitality [7], [27], show strong commercial deployment of local languages as both identity markers and marketing tools. Jayapura’s graffiti and murals align with Belarbi & Belaid’s (2025) view of linguistic landscapes as spaces of resistance [28], where street art becomes a vehicle for reclaiming Papuan cultural narratives under political constraints. Kupang’s top-down signage emphasis suggests a formalized recognition of local languages within municipal governance, aligning with Benu et al. (2023) argument that institutional policy can structure language visibility [6]. Jakarta’s graffiti prominence reflects a countercultural, spatially marginalized but symbolically potent linguistic presence in a highly commodified urban environment. These patterns underscore that distribution is not merely quantitative but reflects deeper ideological, economic, and political dynamics shaping how indigenous languages appear—or are restricted—in urban public space.

4.2. Symbolic meanings of indigenous language use

The thematic symbolism associated with minority language use in signage are across the six study cities. Symbolic meanings were coded through semiotic analysis of textual, visual, and contextual elements,

identifying recurring cultural, economic, and political motifs. This coding reflects the frequency of each symbolic theme identified in signage, with multiple themes sometimes overlapping within a single artifact.

Table 3. Symbolic meanings of minority language signage by city

City	Cultural Identity	Heritage Preservation	Political Assertion	Commercial Branding	Artistic Expression
Makassar	32	18	5	28	12
Surabaya	15	10	4	20	8
Bandung	26	20	6	24	14
Jakarta	18	9	15	12	20
Jayapura	12	8	22	6	25
Kupang	14	16	10	8	9

Table 3 reveals that Makassar and Bandung show a high incidence of signage representing *cultural identity* and *commercial branding*, indicating an integration of indigenous language as both a heritage marker and a marketing strategy. Bandung also scores high in *heritage preservation*, reflecting a deliberate alignment with Sundanese revival movements. Jayapura presents a contrasting pattern, where *political assertion* and *artistic expression* dominate, visible in murals and graffiti that use Papuan languages to articulate resistance narratives and cultural pride. Jakarta's symbolic distribution tilts toward *artistic expression* and *political assertion*, particularly in informal street art zones, suggesting that minority language use here often occurs outside formal economic or policy structures. Kupang demonstrates a strong link between *heritage preservation* and *political assertion*, reflecting local governance efforts to integrate indigenous languages into civic identity. Surabaya shows relatively balanced but lower counts across all categories, hinting at a more diffuse and less symbolically intense language presence.

These symbolic patterns underscore the varied socio-political roles indigenous languages play in urban contexts. In Makassar and Bandung, symbolic use aligns with framework of *commodification of language* [29], where local tongues become part of a city's marketable brand while still signaling cultural belonging. Jayapura's prominence in political assertion and artistic expression reflects argument that marginalized communities often turn to visible, performative modes of linguistic activism to counter hegemonic discourses [30]. Jakarta's similar but more commercially marginal pattern indicates that indigenous language use in the capital may be tolerated—or even celebrated—when framed as creative art, but remains less integrated into official or commercial domains. Kupang's coupling of heritage and politics illustrates how language serves as both a cultural anchor and a tool for asserting regional autonomy within Indonesia's decentralized governance framework. These findings suggest that the symbolic deployment of minority languages is deeply intertwined with local histories, governance structures, and identity politics.

4.3. Power, visibility, and marginalization in urban discourse

The distribution of minority language signage could be seen based on three analytical categories—*High Visibility & Empowerment*, *Moderate Visibility & Neutrality*, and *Low Visibility & Marginalization*. Coding is based on a combined assessment of sign placement, legibility, linguistic prominence, and domain of use. Table 4 reflects how linguistic visibility is distributed across public space, with higher empowerment linked to central locations, large-scale signage, and formal recognition.

Table 4. Visibility and marginalization patterns of minority language signage

City	High Visibility & Empowerment	Moderate Visibility & Neutrality	Low Visibility & Marginalization
Makassar	40	25	8
Surabaya	18	22	15
Bandung	38	27	6
Jakarta	20	16	22
Jayapura	25	14	18
Kupang	30	20	10

Table 4 shows that Makassar and Bandung have the strongest representation in the *High Visibility & Empowerment* category, indicating that minority languages here often occupy prominent urban locations and enjoy official or commercial recognition. Kupang also performs strongly in this category, reflecting the integration of local languages into public governance signage. By contrast, Jakarta and Jayapura have more balanced but less empowering distributions, with significant signage falling into *Low Visibility & Marginalization*—often located in peripheral areas, informal spaces, or obscured by urban development.

Surabaya displays the lowest proportion of high-visibility signage and a relatively high marginalization rate, consistent with the earlier observation of weaker symbolic intensity. The *Moderate Visibility & Neutrality* category appears across all cities, often representing signage where minority languages are present but secondary to Bahasa Indonesia, limiting their potential to convey independent cultural or political authority.

These patterns reflect broader dynamics of linguistic power and urban inequality. In Makassar, Bandung, and Kupang, high-visibility signage supports the ethnolinguistic vitality framework [16], where language presence in dominant spaces correlates with community prestige and institutional support. Jakarta's high marginalization count, despite its cultural diversity, suggests that minority language visibility is spatially and socially constrained, aligning with argument that urban policy often tolerates diversity in symbolic rather than substantive form [31]. Jayapura's mixed profile indicates a contested space where linguistic empowerment through art and activism is offset by political suppression and economic marginalization. Surabaya's weak performance in high visibility aligns with assimilationist language ideologies that prioritize Bahasa Indonesia in both commercial and public domains. Ultimately, the data reveal that visibility is not merely a matter of quantity but of strategic placement and recognition, directly impacting the perceived legitimacy and survival of indigenous languages in urban Indonesia.

5. DISCUSSIONS

The mapping and distribution patterns of minority language signage have significant functional and dysfunctional implications for urban sociolinguistic dynamics. Functionally, cities like Makassar and Bandung, with strong representation in commercial and public signage, demonstrate how linguistic landscapes can foster cultural pride, support intergenerational language transmission, and create market niches grounded in local identity. This aligns with Ahmed's (2014) assertion that visible language presence in urban spaces strengthens symbolic capital [32]. Conversely, the low and uneven distribution in Surabaya and the marginalization of minority languages in Jakarta's formal domains highlight dysfunction, as such patterns limit public legitimacy and reduce opportunities for minority language normalization [27]. When linguistic presence is confined to peripheral or informal contexts, it risks being perceived as culturally ornamental rather than an integral part of daily life [33], [34]. Thus, the functional benefit of visibility hinges not only on frequency but also on strategic placement and perceived authority within the urban environment.

The spatial and categorical differences in can be explained by structural variables such as ethnolinguistic vitality, governance frameworks, and economic integration. In Makassar and Bandung, minority languages benefit from high vitality, sustained by large speaker populations, active cultural institutions, and favorable municipal attitudes toward local identity branding. Such structural support ensures that linguistic landscapes reflect lived multilingualism rather than tokenistic diversity [35], [36]. In contrast, Surabaya's assimilationist tendencies and Jakarta's economic centralization create conditions where Bahasa Indonesia dominates public domains, relegating minority languages to niche or countercultural spaces. Kupang's top-down bilingual signage reflects a governance model where local languages are integrated into formal communication policy, demonstrating that political will can counterbalance smaller speaker populations. Ultimately, the underlying structure driving visibility is a combination of demographic strength, institutional recognition, and economic adaptability, with each factor interacting to shape how languages appear in the urban public sphere [37], [38].

The symbolic meanings of minority language use reveal how linguistic landscapes function as cultural, political, and economic tools—or fail to do so [39], [40]. Functionally, Makassar and Bandung's combination of *cultural identity* and *commercial branding* illustrates Yuan's (2019) notion of the commodification of language, where heritage is preserved while also serving as an economic asset [41]. Jayapura's dominance in *political assertion* and *artistic expression* demonstrates the role of signage as a medium of resistance and identity reclamation, resonating with Coluzzi's (2020) view of street texts as political acts [25]. Dysfunction occurs when symbolic meaning is detached from practical language vitality, as in Jakarta, where artistic use of minority languages thrives in graffiti but lacks institutional or commercial reinforcement. Without broader domain integration, symbolic presence risks being relegated to transient cultural performance, limiting its capacity to foster long-term language sustainability and systemic recognition.

The symbolic configurations are rooted in the historical, political, and economic trajectories of each city [42], [43], [44], [45]. In Makassar and Bandung, a legacy of regional autonomy and strong cultural revival movements facilitates the integration of local languages into both identity and market spaces. Jayapura's symbolic emphasis on political assertion arises from long-standing tensions between Papuan identity and Indonesian state narratives, where public art becomes a safer medium for dissent than formal political discourse. Jakarta's symbolic marginality is shaped by its status as the national economic hub, where commercial efficiency and linguistic standardization favor Bahasa Indonesia, relegating minority languages to informal creative outlets. Kupang's pairing of *heritage preservation* with *political assertion* reflects

regional governance strategies that leverage language as a unifying symbol in a diverse province. These patterns confirm Bolton's (2020) argument that symbolic language use is inseparable from the sociohistorical structures in which it is embedded [46].

The visibility and marginalization patterns have direct implications for linguistic equity and cultural representation [25], [35]. Functionally, high-visibility signage in Makassar, Bandung, and Kupang indicates that minority languages can achieve legitimacy when integrated into central, authoritative, and aesthetically prominent urban spaces. This supports He and Chen's (2024) model, where public visibility reinforces language status and fosters community pride [47]. However, dysfunction emerges in cities like Jakarta and Surabaya, where low-visibility signage perpetuates symbolic exclusion and reinforces perceptions of minority languages as peripheral. Even in Jayapura, where political and artistic uses are strong, significant marginalization in urban cores signals the persistence of spatial inequality. Without deliberate strategies to elevate minority languages into high-visibility domains, their urban presence may remain fragmented, limiting their potential to serve as vehicles of social inclusion and political recognition.

The variation in visibility and marginalization patterns reflects intersecting structural forces: policy implementation, spatial politics, and urban planning priorities. Makassar and Bandung benefit from policy environments that embrace local identity as part of city branding, coupled with strong civil society advocacy. Kupang's results are shaped by formal bilingual governance, where minority language visibility is mandated in public communication. Jakarta's high marginalization is tied to its role as the national capital, where linguistic homogenization supports administrative efficiency and market competitiveness. Surabaya's similar trend reflects a preference for Bahasa Indonesia as a neutral, unifying medium, often at the expense of local language visibility. Jayapura's mixed profile stems from the coexistence of grassroots activism with limited institutional support, illustrating Kasanga's (2012) argument that top-down and bottom-up forces often conflict in shaping linguistic landscapes [36]. These structures demonstrate that visibility is not solely a cultural matter but a product of political choices and spatial governance.

6. CONCLUSION

This study reveals that the visibility, symbolism, and spatial distribution of minority languages in Indonesia's urban public spaces are shaped by a complex interplay of ethnolinguistic vitality, governance frameworks, and socio-political histories. The key lesson is that visibility alone does not guarantee linguistic empowerment; placement, domain integration, and symbolic resonance are equally crucial. Cities like Makassar, Bandung, and Kupang demonstrate how combining institutional support with commercial and cultural engagement can enhance both functional use and symbolic legitimacy of indigenous languages. Conversely, Jakarta, Surabaya, and parts of Jayapura highlight the risks of relegating minority languages to peripheral or informal spaces, where they may become ornamental rather than integral. The strength of this research lies in its multi-layered analytical approach—integrating Linguistic Landscape Analysis, semiotics, and Critical Discourse Analysis—which offers a renewed perspective on urban multilingualism by linking spatial patterns to identity politics, cultural commodification, and policy implementation.

Despite these contributions, the study has limitations that invite further exploration. First, the analysis focuses on a selected set of cities, which may not fully represent Indonesia's vast linguistic diversity or rural-urban variations. Second, the cross-sectional design captures a specific moment in time, limiting insights into longitudinal changes in language visibility and symbolism. Third, while interviews and document reviews enrich the interpretation, deeper ethnographic engagement with communities could uncover more nuanced perceptions and power negotiations behind signage production. Future research should adopt a longitudinal, comparative framework encompassing more cities and integrating digital ethnography to examine the online-offline interplay of minority language representation. Additionally, participatory approaches involving local artists, policymakers, and community members could co-create strategies for sustainable linguistic visibility.

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AUTHOR CONTRIBUTIONS STATEMENT

Winie Setia Prilapnita Hapsari: conceptualization (lead), supervision (lead), writing – review and editing (lead); **Alif Via Sufianti:** data curation (lead), formal analysis (lead), writing – original draft (lead), writing – review and editing (supporting).

CONFLICT OF INTEREST STATEMENT

Authors state no conflict of interest.

INFORMED CONSENT

We have obtained informed consent from all individuals included in this study.

ETHICAL APPROVAL

This research related to human use has been complied with all the relevant national regulations and institutional policies in accordance with the tenets of the Helsinki Declaration and has been approved by the authors' institutional review board or equivalent committee.

DATA AVAILABILITY

Data availability is not applicable to this article as no new data were created or analyzed in this study.

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