

Linguistic landscape in the Glodok Chinatown area

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ABSTRACT

Language functions not only as a means of communication but also as a cultural marker that is visibly manifested in public spaces through the linguistic landscape (LL). Previous LL studies in Indonesia have focused on locations such as airports, train stations, and cemeteries, while Glodok Chinatown, the oldest Chinese settlement in Jakarta, has received limited scholarly attention. This study aims to (1) identify the dominant languages used on public signage in Glodok and (2) analyze how language choices reflect socio-cultural identity in the area. Employing a qualitative descriptive approach, 67 public signs were documented and analyzed using a linguistic landscape categorization framework. The findings indicate that bilingual signage dominates the area (47.76%), particularly Indonesian–Mandarin combinations, followed by monolingual signs (44.78%) and multilingual signs (7.46%). Indonesian functions as a unifying national language, while Mandarin symbolizes the preservation of the Chinese ethnic heritage. The presence of English and other languages such as Japanese, Korean, Arabic, and Minangkabau reflects Glodok's multicultural character and its engagement with globalization and economic activities. These patterns demonstrate that Glodok's linguistic landscape operates not only as a communicative tool but also as a symbolic space where cultural identity negotiation, identity maintenance, and economic considerations intersect. By examining a historically multicultural district, this study contributes empirical evidence to linguistic landscape research and situates Glodok within broader discussions of identity, language policy, and globalization.

Keywords: Glodok Chinatown; linguistic landscape; multilingualism; public signage

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INTRODUCTION

Language is the primary medium of human social interaction, expressed through speech or writing. These two forms possess distinct characteristics. Oral communication generally involves paralinguistic elements such as tone of voice, body movements, and facial expressions, whereas written communication relies on linguistic conventions such as punctuation and grammatical structures to facilitate understanding (Humaeroh et al., 2023). Beyond serving as a tool for communication between

individuals or groups, language also reflects a society's culture. One way to identify such cultural representation is through the use of language in public spaces (Suri & Datang, 2024). This concept is known as the linguistic landscape (LL), which refers to the use of language in public spaces as a marker of a region's identity. Linguistic landscape refers to the visibility and presence of languages displayed on public and commercial signs within a particular territory or region (Landry & Bourhis, 1997). According to Landry and Bourhis (1997), the linguistic landscape encompasses various forms of linguistic signage in public spaces, including street names, signs of public institutions, commercial advertisements, and the names of shops and government institutions. These signs function not only as sources of information but also as indicators of the status, power, and social presence of a language within a given society. Within this framework, the linguistic landscape has two main functions, namely an informational function that indicates the dominant or official language in a region, and a symbolic function that reflects the identity, prestige, and level of vitality of the language group that uses it. The concept of LL includes all linguistic objects that characterize public environments, such as warning signs, instructions, public road signs, advertising billboards, posters, street names, graffiti, and notices on government and non-government buildings (Alomoush, 2019).

Investigating LL is crucial for understanding the complex interplay between language, society, and culture, as they both reflect and shape social and cultural associations within public spaces. LL reflects and shapes social and cultural associations, making them crucial for understanding the dynamics of social life (Li, 2015). They can reveal the socio-cultural and sociolinguistic structures present in specific areas, such as the impact of multiculturalism and linguistic diversity (Yavuz et al., 2024). Moreover, LL reveals the implementation and impact of language policies, for instance, through the dominance of particular languages in public signage, while simultaneously functioning as a map of identity that shapes perceptions of cultural space and interethnic relations (Begum & Sinha, 2021; Beskempirova et al., 2025). Beyond their analytical value, LLs also serve as effective pedagogical tools, as their integration into language learning and teaching can enhance learners' language awareness, lingua-pragmatic competence, critical thinking, and engagement with real-world linguistic environments (Budinić & Zubkova, 2023; Kruszynska, 2024). Finally, LL are essential for examining language contact, globalization, and migration, as they illustrate how languages coexist, compete, and evolve in response to shifting political, economic, and demographic conditions across diverse sociolinguistic contexts (Almahdi, 2025; Budinić & Zubkova, 2023; Hajdarović, 2024; Karpava, 2024). LL studies aim to offer new perspectives in the field of social multilingualism, particularly concerning language choice, language hierarchy, language contact phenomena, regulation, and literacy (Gorter, 2013). Its multifaceted nature makes LL a subject of investigation across various interdisciplinary perspectives. In LL analysis, two key aspects must be considered: who produces the text and for whom it is intended. Clear identification of these aspects enriches the understanding of LL's complexity (Yoniartini, 2021).

LL offers valuable insights into social multilingualism by highlighting language choices, hierarchies, contact phenomena, regulatory impacts, and educational benefits. These perspectives are supported by empirical studies across diverse contexts, demonstrating the multifaceted role of LL in understanding and promoting multilingualism. LL studies reveal how communities negotiate language choice in public spaces, reflecting social values, power relations, and cultural identities. For example, research in Siliguri, India, shows that English dominates public signage, followed by Bengali, Hindi, Nepali, and Urdu, indicating its high symbolic value and linguistic capital, while in Kermanshah, Iran, graffiti is overwhelmingly written in Farsi, with only minimal use of Arabic and English, signaling dominant language preferences in everyday expression (Bhujel & Sinha, 2025; Shariatpanah et al., 2025). The visibility of particular languages often mirrors their social status and the influence of language policies, as seen in Brittany and Corsica, France, where the presence of regional languages such as Breton and Corsican on public signs underscores their cultural significance and policy support (Blackwood, 2011). Similarly, the linguistic landscape of Seoul demonstrates pragmatic inequality, with Korean occupying a central position and English frequently functioning as a marker of foreignness (Fedorova, 2020). LL studies also document widespread multilingual signage that illustrates language

contact and coexistence, such as in Davao City, Philippines, where public park signs combine English, Cebuano, Filipino, Spanish, and Japanese to serve both informational and symbolic purposes, reflecting the city's diverse linguistic heritage. Moreover, LL research distinguishes between top-down signs, which are official and standardized, and bottom-up signs, which are informal and diverse, revealing how state language policies interact with grassroots practices, as evidenced in Davao City and in Hanoi's Old Quarter, where legislated and de facto policies produce lived multilingualism and hybridity (Phan & Starks, 2020; Pil et al., 2025). Beyond descriptive analysis, LL has increasingly been applied as a pedagogical tool, with studies in the Guangdong–Hong Kong–Macao Greater Bay Area and Japan demonstrating its effectiveness in enhancing students' multilingual awareness, critical literacy, and cultural sensitivity through direct engagement with everyday linguistic environments (Allen, 2025; Si, 2025).

Indonesia is one of the most multilingual and multicultural countries in the world, with more than 700 regional languages coexisting alongside Indonesian as the national language (Hamied & Musthafa, 2019; Kustyarini, 2020; Sakhiyya & Martin-Anatias, 2023). The multilingual and multicultural context of Indonesia makes LL research particularly relevant. The diversity of ethnicities, languages, and cultures across regions presents unique phenomena in the representation of language in public spaces. This linguistic diversity not only reflects cultural richness but also shapes everyday communication practices in public spaces, especially in urban areas, which are meeting points for various ethnicities and economic interests (Putri et al., 2025). One area of interest is Glodok Chinatown in Jakarta, which has been the city's oldest and largest economic center since the 17th century (Nabilah & Setiawan, 2023) and is a product of cultural interactions among Chinese, Sundanese, Betawi, and other ethnic groups. In addition to being a historical and culinary tourism destination (Andini & Nugraha, 2023; Oktarina & Kurniawan, 2021), Glodok Chinatown reflects a rich linguistic identity through public signage combining Mandarin (Hokkien dialect), Indonesian, and English. This phenomenon reflects the negotiation of cultural identity, economic strategy, and the influence of globalization in the local Indonesian context, thus making Glodok Chinatown a relevant and worthy empirical site to be studied in linguistic landscape and cultural identity research. LL studies in Indonesia have been conducted in various locations, such as public cemeteries in Malang City (Ardhian et al., 2023), Sultan Hasanuddin International Airport (Mahmudah & Radin, 2023), Jatinegara Station in East Jakarta (Khoiriyah & Savitri, 2021), and coffee shop naming in Trenggalek (Wijaya & Savitri, 2021). However, no studies have been found focusing on LL in Glodok Chinatown. Existing research generally highlights architecture (Lestari & Tohjiwa, 2023), tourism (Alfandy & Krisnadi, 2023), and culinary aspects (Andini & Nugraha, 2023), but has not specifically addressed language representation in public spaces.

Based on this gap, the present study focuses on identifying the dominant languages used on public signage in Glodok Chinatown and analyzing how these language use patterns represent local cultural identity. The data are worth observing because public signage in Glodok Chinatown constitutes a visible and authentic representation of everyday language practices that reflect broader social, cultural, and economic dynamics. As a historically significant Chinatown area, Glodok functions as a multilingual and multicultural space where language choice on signs is not arbitrary but closely tied to identity construction, cultural preservation, commercial strategy, and power relations. Observing the dominant languages used in public signage allows the study to capture how local actors negotiate between heritage languages, the national language, and global languages in representing Chineseness, Indonesianness, and modernity. Observational methods allow researchers to capture data in natural settings, providing a more accurate representation of real-life behaviors and events. This is particularly useful in educational research, where direct observation can yield a 'real life' picture of classroom dynamics and student interactions (Rose & Grosvenor, 2013). Furthermore, signage data provide tangible evidence of how cultural identity is maintained, adapted, or commodified in public space, making them a valuable empirical source for understanding the intersection of language, culture, and place in an urban context.

To fill a gap in LL studies in Glodok Subdistrict, West Jakarta, and to contribute to a deeper understanding of the relationship between language, culture, and public space within a historic multicultural area, this study aims (1) to identify the dominant languages used on public signage and (2) to analyze how language choices reflect socio-cultural identity in Glodok Chinatown. The research is worth doing because it contributes both theoretically and practically to the study of linguistic landscapes and cultural identity in multicultural urban settings. Theoretically, it addresses a gap in linguistic landscape research by providing empirical evidence from Glodok Chinatown, a context that remains underrepresented in existing studies, particularly regarding how language dominance on public signage reflects local cultural identity. By examining the interaction between heritage languages, the national language, and global languages, the study enriches understanding of language negotiation, identity construction, and symbolic power in public space. Practically, the findings can inform cultural preservation efforts, urban cultural policy, and heritage-based tourism by highlighting how language choices in signage function as markers of identity and cultural continuity. In addition, the research offers insights for educators and policymakers on the role of public language use in sustaining multilingual awareness and cultural diversity within Indonesia's pluralistic society.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The concept and function of linguistic landscape

The concept of the linguistic landscape (LL) refers to the visible display of language in public spaces, including street signs, billboards, shop signs, advertisements, and official government signage (Alomoush, 2019; Tabajunda, 2018; Yuan, 2019). Rooted in sociolinguistics, LL research examines how languages are represented visually and how such representations reflect broader socio-cultural dynamics, power relations, and identity construction within a society (Demir & Çetinkaya, 2023; Ivković & Lotherington, 2009; Peng et al., 2022). As a field of inquiry, LL provides insight into multilingual practices in urban spaces and reveals how language choices are shaped by historical, political, and social contexts. The presence or absence of particular languages in public signage is therefore not accidental, but closely connected to language ideologies, policy frameworks, and social hierarchies operating within a given community.

LL functions as a visual text that embodies the interaction among language, culture, and society. Through the selection, arrangement, and prominence of languages on public signage, LL reflects processes of self-identification, cultural representation, and the coexistence of multiple language communities (Beskempirova et al., 2025; Chen, 2025; Xia, 2025). The dominance of certain languages often signals social prestige and power, while the marginalization of others may indicate unequal power relations or limited institutional support (Kotze & du Plessis, 2010; Shan et al., 2019). Studies have shown that LL are influenced by language policies and ideological orientations, which may either promote linguistic diversity or reinforce the dominance of majority languages, as observed in contexts such as Danish international companies and the urban landscape of Pristina (Kraft & Lønsmann, 2018; Munishi, 2018). Beyond their sociopolitical significance, LL have also been recognized as pedagogical resources that connect classroom learning with real-world language use, fostering cultural awareness, multiliteracy, and critical engagement with social realities (Kruszynska, 2024; Martínez-León et al., 2025; Niedt & Seals, 2020).

Landry and Bourhis (1997) conceptualize LL as an indicator of ethnolinguistic vitality, arguing that the visibility of a language in public space reflects the social strength and symbolic power of its speakers. From this perspective, the predominance of a majority language on commercial or official signage may indicate linguistic hegemony, while the presence of minority languages often signals resistance, identity maintenance, or claims to visibility. Building on this framework, scholars have emphasized that LL serve two primary functions: informational and symbolic (Alomoush, 2019; Yuan, 2019). The informational function relates to the practical role of signage in conveying information and marking territorial or linguistic boundaries, enabling the public to recognize the linguistic composition of a given space.

The symbolic function of LL, by contrast, highlights how language operates as a marker of social status, political legitimacy, and cultural identity. Language displayed in public space is not merely a neutral communicative tool, but a semiotic resource that reflects power relations and ideological positioning within society. Through signage, communities assert their presence, negotiate identity, and reproduce collective values in the public sphere. As such, the linguistic landscape simultaneously functions as an objective medium of information and a symbolic reflection of the social, cultural, and political dynamics shaping a particular space (Landry & Bourhis, 1997).

LL as an arena for identity and economic negotiations

Shohamy and Gorter (2009) extend the understanding of LL by conceptualizing it as an arena where ideology, identity, and economic interests are continuously negotiated. In this view, public signage is shaped by the interaction of multiple actors, including state institutions, business owners, and local communities. Language choices in public space are therefore not solely determined by communicative needs, but also by ideological orientations and strategic considerations. In multilingual settings, the selection of certain languages over others may reflect alignment with state language policies, assertions of ethnic identity, or attempts to position oneself within broader socio-political structures.

In the economic domain, LL plays a crucial role in commercial communication and market positioning. Languages used on shop signs, advertisements, and brand names often function as symbolic capital, employed to attract specific consumer groups or project particular images such as modernity, authenticity, or exclusivity (Al-Badawi, 2025; Said, 2025). The use of global languages like English frequently indexes international orientation and prestige, while local or ethnic languages evoke familiarity, tradition, and cultural belonging (Hazaea & Qassem, 2025; James, 2014; Kamalova, 2025; Troyer, 2012). Thus, LL becomes a site where economic objectives intersect with cultural representation, enabling business actors to negotiate identity while responding to market demands.

At the same time, LL serves as spaces for identity construction and maintenance among minority and migrant communities. Various empirical contexts demonstrate how LL reflects complex and contextual social interactions. In Piazza Garibaldi, Naples, for example, the linguistic landscape reveals a fluid and intersecting migrant social network, challenging the notion of a homogeneous and static ethnic community (Tufi, 2022). In suburban Beijing, rural-urban migrant workers utilize linguistic signs to construct identities as urban workers, while simultaneously shaping the social meaning of the spaces in which they live and work (Dong, 2020). A similar trend is evident in Bauleni, Zambia, where minority languages in LL reflects migrants' cultural expressions and adaptation strategies, combining old linguistic repertoires with new environments (Simungala, 2025).

Furthermore, LL functions as a means of visualizing collective identity and as a strategy for community visibility. In Vista Alegre, Madrid, various groups use LL to assert their presence in public spaces and construct a shared identity based on their particular national origins (Dorado-Escribano, 2025). Meanwhile, in Chengdu, China, the emergence of Tibetan in the linguistic landscape reflects both ideologies of acceptance and the complex dynamics of integration between Tibetan migrants and the majority society (Yao & Nie, 2024). Taken together, these examples confirm that LL is an important medium in understanding how identity, power, and belonging are produced and reproduced in urban spaces. Consequently, LL should be understood not merely as a reflection of linguistic diversity but as an active social space where identity, power, and economy converge. This perspective underscores the importance of LL studies in revealing the complex relationships between language, culture, and public space, particularly in urban settings characterized by historical depth and multicultural coexistence.

METHOD

Research design in this study is grounded in the principle that language is a socially embedded phenomenon whose meanings are shaped by cultural and interactional contexts (Jaspers, 2012). To understand how language functions communicatively and symbolically in public spaces, it is essential

to examine linguistic practices as they naturally occur within specific social settings (Kelly, 2015; Ogbu, 2019).

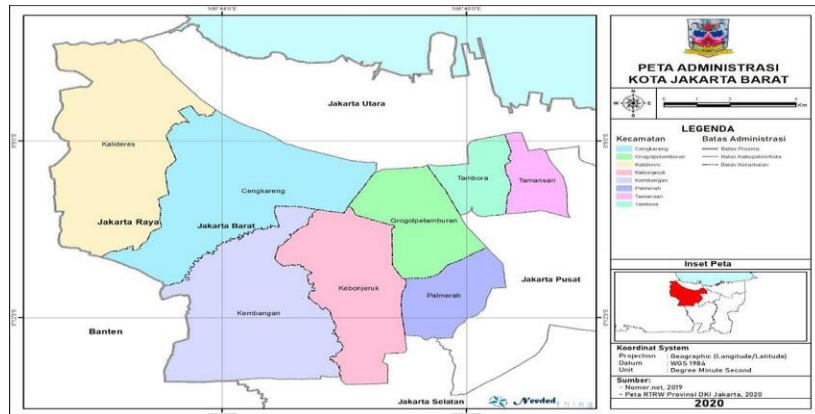
The research was conducted in Glodok Subdistrict, an area widely recognized as Chinatown in West Jakarta. According to the [West Jakarta Central Bureau of Statistics \(2024\)](#), population of 8,610 residents, comprising 4,158 males and 4,452 females. While the majority of the population is of Chinese descent, other ethnic groups such as Betawi, Sundanese, and Javanese also reside in the area, albeit in smaller numbers. This demographic composition creates a multilingual and multicultural environment that is particularly relevant for examining language use in public spaces. This study acknowledges that focusing on a single research site may limit the generalizability of the findings to other contexts. Nevertheless, the site-specific focus allows for a deeper and more nuanced understanding of localized linguistic practices. Future research may build on these findings by conducting comparative studies across different urban areas or by employing mixed-method approaches to capture broader patterns of language use.

Given the study's emphasis on meaning, context, and social interaction, a qualitative approach was deemed most appropriate. Qualitative research is an approach to inquiry that seeks to understand social phenomena by exploring the meanings people assign to their experiences. It is conducted through intensive and prolonged contact with participants in naturalistic settings, using words as the primary form of data, and aims to produce rich, contextualized descriptions and explanations of human processes and actions (Miles et al., 2014).

Therefore, this study uses a qualitative descriptive research design to capture linguistic phenomena in their natural setting. This design allows for a detailed exploration of both the communicative and symbolic functions of language, as well as the contextual and sociocultural factors that shape language use in the study area.

Figure 1

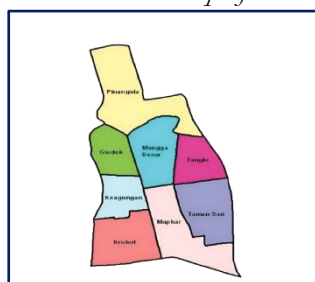
Administrative Map of West Jakarta City, Special Capital Region of Jakarta



Source: (Lim & Supatra, 2023)

Figure 2

Administrative Map of Taman Sari District, West Jakarta City



Source: (West Jakarta Central Bureau of Statistics, 2023)

In this study, the population refers to all public signs located within the administrative boundaries of Glodok Subdistrict. From this population, a sample of 67 public signs was selected using purposive sampling, as the study aimed to capture signs that were most relevant to the analysis of language use and cultural representation in public space. The selection was guided by explicit inclusion and exclusion criteria. The inclusion criteria required that the signs be situated in publicly accessible areas within Glodok, contain identifiable written text in one or more languages, and be permanent or semi-permanent in nature, ensuring their stability and relevance to the local linguistic landscape. Conversely, the exclusion criteria eliminated signs without textual elements (such as those consisting solely of images or logos), private signs located in non-accessible areas, and temporary signs displayed for fewer than three days. This purposive approach allowed the study to focus on linguistically and culturally meaningful signage that accurately represents language use patterns in Glodok Chinatown.

The research was conducted over two months, from March to April 2024, and followed a structured sequence of stages. The pre-research phase, carried out during the first week of March, involved conducting a site survey and determining the observation points. This was followed by the field data collection stage, which took place from the second week of March to the third week of April, during which public signs were documented and contextual observations were made. Finally, in the fourth week of April, a preliminary analysis was conducted, focusing on classifying the documented public signs according to their language categories.

To ensure comprehensive and accurate documentation in collecting the data, two primary instruments were employed. A digital camera was used to capture clear photographs of public signs, making certain that both the textual content and relevant contextual elements were visible. Complementing this, an observation checklist was utilized to systematically record essential details, including the location of each sign, the languages used, and the situational context in which the sign was displayed. The combined use of these instruments guaranteed both visual clarity and descriptive precision in representing the linguistic elements of the research objects.

The collected data were analyzed using the LL categorization framework proposed by Backhaus (2006) (as cited in Mubarok et al., 2024). The analysis process began with language identification, which involved determining the language or languages present on each public sign. This was followed by categorization, in which the signs were classified as monolingual, bilingual, or multilingual. Quantitative calculations were then carried out to determine the percentage distribution of each language category. Finally, a qualitative interpretation was conducted through a systematically close reading of the selected public signs to examine the socio-cultural and contextual factors influencing language choices. This process involved analyzing the content, language combinations, ordering and prominence of languages, and symbolic elements in relation to the social functions of the signs and the local context of Glodok Chinatown. The interpretation was further informed by visual analysis of photographic documentation and by situating the signs within their immediate spatial and socio-cultural environments, such as commercial settings, religious sites, and heritage areas. Supported by tables, figures, and photographic evidence, this combined quantitative–qualitative approach enabled the study to identify statistical patterns while also generating rich contextual insights into multilingual practices and cultural identity construction in Glodok’s public spaces.

FINDINGS

This study analyzes 67 photographs of public signs in Glodok Chinatown to reveal the distribution of languages in the LL. The signs are classified into three categories: monolingual, bilingual, and multilingual. The calculation results are presented in Table 1.

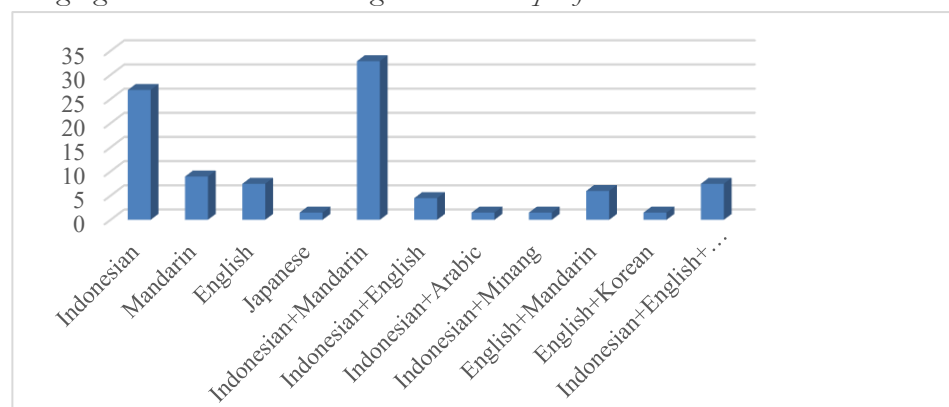
Table 1*Types of Signs in Glodok Chinatown*

Category	Language Combination	Number	Percentage (%)
Monolingual	Indonesian	18	26.87
	Mandarin	6	8.96
	English	5	7.46
	Japanese	1	1.49
Sub-total	—	30	44.78
Bilingual	Indonesian + Mandarin	22	32.84
	Indonesian + English	3	4.48
	Indonesian + Arabic	1	1.49
	Indonesian + Minang	1	1.49
	English + Mandarin	4	5.97
	English + Korean	1	1.49
Sub-total	—	32	47.76
Multilingual	Indonesian + English + Mandarin	5	7.46
Total	—	67	100

The LL of Glodok Chinatown reveals a diverse distribution of sign types, with monolingual, bilingual, and multilingual signs contributing to its unique character. Monolingual signs, which use only one language, account for 30 signs (44.78% of the total). Among these, Indonesian is the most prevalent, appearing on 18 signs (26.87%), underscoring its role as the primary means of public communication. Mandarin follows with 6 signs (8.96%), reflecting the presence and cultural heritage of the local Chinese community. English appears on 5 signs (7.46%), suggesting an appeal to international visitors and a modern image, while Japanese is seen on a single sign (1.49%), likely influenced by Japanese popular culture or branding strategies.

Bilingual signs dominate the area, comprising 32 signs (47.76%). The most common combination is Indonesian and Mandarin, appearing on 22 signs (32.84%), highlighting business owners' efforts to engage both the local population and the Chinese-speaking community. Other combinations include Indonesian and English (3 signs, 4.48%) and Indonesian and Arabic (1 sign, 1.49%), indicating outreach to tourists and the Muslim community, respectively. The presence of Indonesian and Minang (1 sign, 1.49%) suggests regional identity among certain business owners. Additionally, English paired with Mandarin (4 signs, 5.97%) and English paired with Korean (1 sign, 1.49%) point to broader market segmentation, including East Asian visitors.

Multilingual signs are the least common, representing only 5 signs (7.46%). These combine Indonesian, English, and Mandarin, aiming to maximize communication reach in areas frequented by both international tourists and the local Chinese community. Although limited in number, these signs play a strategic role in projecting Glodok as a multicultural and welcoming destination for visitors from various linguistic backgrounds.

Figure 3*Language Distribution in the Linguistic Landscape of Glodok Chinatown*

Overall, bilingualism emerges as the defining feature of Glodok Chinatown's linguistic landscape, followed by monolingualism, with multilingualism being rare. The dominance of the Indonesian–Mandarin combination emphasizes the central role of these two languages in the area's social, economic, and cultural interactions. Meanwhile, the presence of other foreign languages such as English, Japanese, Korean, and Arabic reflects an international orientation and the ethnic diversity shaping Glodok's public space (Figure 3).

Monolingual Signs

First, monolingual signs, which use only one language, account for 30 signs (44.78% of the total). Among these, Indonesian is the most prevalent, appearing on 18 signs (26.87%), underscoring its role as the primary means of public communication. Mandarin follows with 6 signs (8.96%), reflecting the presence and cultural heritage of the local Chinese community. English appears on 5 signs (7.46%), suggesting an appeal to international visitors and a modern image, while Japanese is seen on a single sign (1.49%), likely influenced by Japanese popular culture or branding strategies.

Figure 4

Monolingual Signs in Glodok Chinatown

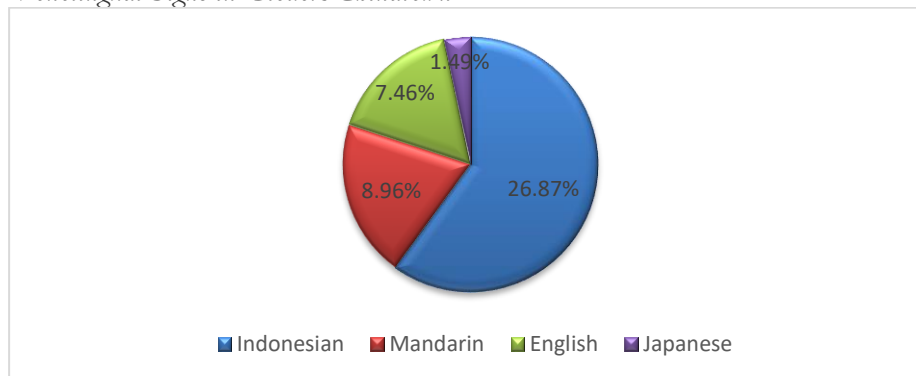


Figure 4 illustrates the distribution of monolingual signs in Glodok Chinatown, encompassing four languages: Indonesian, Mandarin, English, and Japanese. Indonesian occupies the highest frequency, followed by Mandarin in second place, English in third, and Japanese in the last position. These findings indicate that Indonesian and Mandarin hold both commercial and symbolic value in the Glodok area. This aligns with the fact that Glodok is historically recognized as Jakarta's (particularly West Jakarta's) Chinatown, which has long served as a residential and trading center for the predominantly Chinese community (Muliawan & Winata, 2020). Here are some data on monolingual signs in Glodok Chinatown.

Figure 5

Mie Kangkung & Laksa Ayam Petak 9



Source: (Author's documentation)

The use of Indonesian in Figure 5 can be categorized into two types. The phrase “*Mie Kangkung & Laksa Ayam*” follows the Enhanced Spelling System (Ejaan yang Disempurnakan—EYD), whereas the phrase “*Teraoetentik Sedjak 1978*” employs the Van Ophuijsen orthography. The Van Ophuijsen spelling system, introduced in 1901 when Indonesian was still referred to as Malay, is characterized by the use of the letters “dj” to represent the /j/ sound and “oe” to represent the /u/ sound (Sucipta & Yuliantini, 2023). The use of this archaic spelling here serves to emphasize to customers that the establishment has been in operation for a long time (since 1978). Another example of Indonesian usage on signs in the linguistic landscape of Glodok Chinatown can be seen in Figure 6.

Figure 6
Toko Obat “Sumatera”



Source: (Author's documentation)

The sign in Figure 6 is entirely in Indonesian, placing it within the monolingual category of the linguistic landscape in Glodok Chinatown. The phrase “*Toko Obat*” directly translates to “medicine shop,” while “*Sumatera*” refers to the name of the shop, likely indicating either the origin of the products or evoking an association with the island of Sumatra.

The orthography used here follows the Enhanced Spelling System (Ejaan yang Disempurnakan—EYD), which has been the standard for Indonesian since its adoption in 1972. The use of Indonesian in this form reflects its role as the national language and its strong presence in commercial signage, even in ethnically diverse districts such as Glodok.

Figure 7
Toko Obat “Mandarin”



Source: (Author's documentation)

The signage in Figure 7 consists entirely of Indonesian text, placing it in the monolingual category of Glodok Chinatown's linguistic landscape. The phrase “*Toko Obat*” translates to “medicine shop,” and “*Mandarin*” is the shop's name, possibly chosen to evoke cultural or heritage associations with Chinese traditions.

Two different signboards are displayed: the first provides complete business information, including the address (*Jl. Pancoran No. 16, Jakarta Barat*), business license number (*Izin No. 873*), and a note stating “*Tidak menerima resep dokter*” (“Does not accept doctor's prescriptions”). The second sign presents a simplified format with only the shop name and address. Both follow the Enhanced Spelling

System (Ejaan yang Disempurnakan—EYD), indicating adherence to modern Indonesian orthography standards.

The monolingual use of Indonesian in this case underscores the dominant role of the national language in formal and commercial contexts. It also aligns with The Presidential Regulation of the Republic of Indonesia No. 63 of 2019 on the Use of the Indonesian Language, which requires Indonesian to be used for public signage, especially in business-related contexts, as specified in Article 33, paragraphs 1 and 2 ([Regulation of The President of the Republic of Indonesia Number 63 in 2019](#)) about the use of the Indonesian Language. In addition to the use of Indonesian, the LL in the Glodok Chinatown area also features English forms, as illustrated in [Figure 8](#) and [Figure 9](#).

Figure 8

Piece of Peace Tea & Cafe



Source: (Author's documentation)

Figure 9

Asian Delights Ho Lai



Source: (Author's documentation)

The use of English in public spaces, particularly in store names, is inseparable from its status as an international language. Beyond its global role, English is often perceived as a symbol of modernity, attractiveness, and higher market value in the eyes of consumers, especially among younger generations. Consequently, the adoption of English can serve as a marketing strategy to attract potential customers.

This is evident in [Figure 9](#), where the use of English is not only reflected in the store name but also reinforced by a visually striking and aesthetically designed signboard, making it more appealing. Such application of English simultaneously demonstrates openness to a wider market, including customers from outside the region and even international visitors ([Suri & Datang, 2024](#)). Another language variety that contributes to the LL of Glodok Chinatown is the use of local languages, one of which is Minangkabau, as exemplified in [Figure 10](#).

Figure 10
Amak Jakarta



Source: (Author's documentation)

In [Figure 10](#), a combination of Indonesian and Minangkabau is observed. The word *Amak*, derived from the Minangkabau language, means “mother,” a term deeply embedded with connotations of kinship, warmth, and tradition. Its selection not only evokes emotional appeal for the Minangkabau community residing in and around Glodok Chinatown but also fosters a sense of familiarity for consumers in general.

Meanwhile, the word *Jakarta* functions as a strong geographical marker, emphasizing the connection to the urban context of the capital city. Thus, the fusion of *Amak* (representing Minangkabau cultural identity) and *Jakarta* (representing urban locality) creates a dual identity that is strategically significant. This duality simultaneously addresses two target markets: (1) the Minangkabau diaspora who find cultural resonance in the term *Amak*, and (2) *Jakarta* residents, particularly those in Glodok Chinatown, who are more strongly connected with the symbol of the metropolitan city. This combination demonstrates how LL can serve as a medium for representing hybrid identities, where the use of local languages functions not only as an emblem of ethnicity but also as a commercial strategy that strengthens emotional proximity with specific communities, while remaining relevant within a multicultural urban setting. In the monolingual context, the LL of Glodok Chinatown also displays the use of Arabic on signboards for Islamic places of worship.

Figure 11
Musholla Jam'yyatut-Tujjar



Source: (Author's documentation)

Arabic appears in the Glodok Chinatown area through the nameplate of a *musholla*, serving as a strong marker of Islamic identity within an LL otherwise dominated by signs in Mandarin. In [Figure 11](#), the presence of Arabic script introduces a linguistic contrast that enriches the visual diversity of the landscape while reflecting interethnic social harmony. The term *Jam'yyatut-Tujjar* itself, translated into Indonesian as “Association of Traders,” carries historical significance. Since the 18th century,

Glodok has been recognized as a trading hub shaped by interactions between Arab (Hadrami) merchants and local Muslim communities from Javanese, Betawi, and other ethnic groups (Oktarina & Kurniawan, 2021). Thus, the *musholla* functions not only as a space of worship but also as a social sphere that connects Muslim migrants with local trading networks. In addition to the *musholla Jam'iyatut-Tujjar*, religious diversity is also reflected in the presence of temples and prayer altars used by the Chinese community in Glodok Chinatown. As depicted in Figure 12 and Figure 13 below.

Figure 12

Toa Se Bio Temple



Source: (Author's documentation)

Figure 13

Lo Cia Goan Soei Prayer Altar, Jakarta



Source: (Author's documentation)

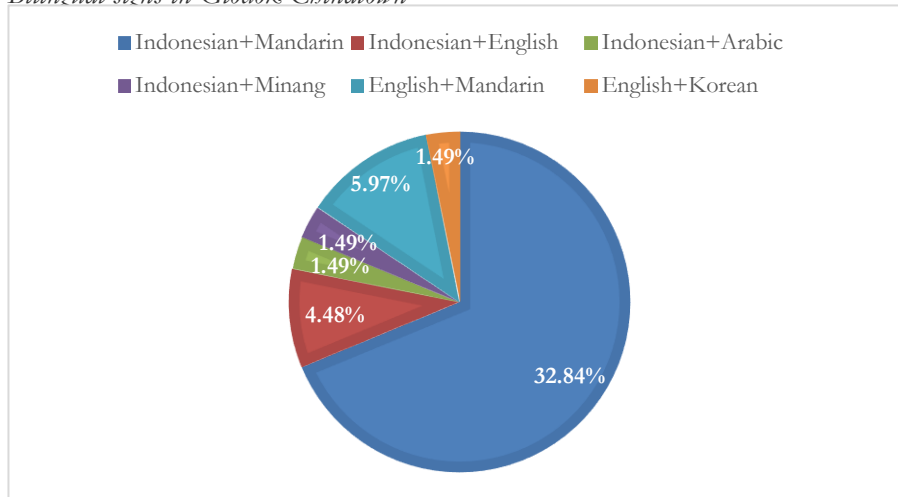
The presence of the Toa Se Bio Temple (Figure 12) and the Lo Cia Goan Soei Prayer Altar (Figure 13) further highlights the religious diversity embedded within the LL of Glodok Chinatown. These sacred sites serve not only as spiritual centers for the Chinese community but also as cultural landmarks that reinforce their historical connection to the area. The visual and symbolic prominence of such sites in public space demonstrates the coexistence of multiple belief systems, where Buddhist-Taoist traditions intersect harmoniously with Islamic and other religious practices within the same neighborhood. Through the visibility of these religious symbols, the LL of Glodok Chinatown transcends its role as a mere representation of language. It becomes a spatial testimony of Jakarta's multiculturalism, where linguistic, cultural, and spiritual identities converge to produce a dynamic expression of tolerance and communal harmony.

Bilingual Signs

Second, bilingual signs dominate the area, accounting for 32 instances (47.76%). The most prevalent combination is Indonesian and Mandarin, which appears on 22 signs (32.84%). This reflects deliberate efforts by business owners to connect with both the local population and the Chinese-speaking community. Other pairings also emerge, such as Indonesian and English (3 signs, 4.48%) and Indonesian and Arabic (1 sign, 1.49%), signaling outreach to international tourists and the Muslim community. The use of Indonesian and Minang on a single sign (1.49%) underscores the assertion of

regional identity among certain entrepreneurs. Additionally, combinations like English and Mandarin (4 signs, 5.97%) and English and Korean (1 sign, 1.49%) reveal broader market segmentation strategies, extending their appeal to East Asian visitors.

Figure 14
Bilingual signs in Glodok Chinatown



The following examples illustrate these patterns.

Figure 15
Remen Daging Sapi Lanzhou China



Source: (Author's documentation)

Figure 16
Kue Tjong Chiu Pha, Brand "Sie Sin"



Source: (Author's documentation)

Figure 15 and Figure 16 illustrate the use of Indonesian and Mandarin in food-related signage. *Remen Daging Sapi Lanzhou* refers to a halal noodle dish typical of Lanzhou, China, renowned for its hand-pulled noodles (*lamian*) and rich beef broth. *Kue Tjong Chiu Pha*, also known as the mooncake, is

a traditional Chinese pastry closely associated with the Mid-Autumn Festival. Both signs employ a combination of Indonesian and Mandarin, but their use differs significantly.

In [Figure 15](#), Mandarin is presented in Hànzì (汉字/Chinese characters), such as 中国兰州牛肉拉面 (*Zhōngguó lánzhōu niúròu lāmian*, “Chinese Lanzhou beef noodles”) and 来自中国西北穆斯林餐厅 (*Láizì zhōngguó xīběi mùsīlín cāntīng*, “From Northwest China Muslim Restaurant”). Hànzì consists of symbols or ideograms in which each character corresponds to a syllable and conveys a particular meaning ([Fadjriah, 2025](#)). The characters here are written in the simplified form, reflecting the influence of standardized international Mandarin.

In contrast, [Figure 16](#) incorporates Mandarin in the Hokkien dialect, which can be recognized through its orthographic representation. This difference likely stems from the origin of the products or the ethnic identity of the sellers. Among Chinese communities in Indonesia, Hokkien remains widely used and, for many speakers, is more familiar than standard Mandarin itself. Overall, these examples demonstrate that the combination of Indonesian and Mandarin is the dominant pattern in the linguistic landscape of Glodok Chinatown.

Figure 17

Toko Obat Bintang Selatan



Source: (Author's documentation)

[Figure 17](#) provides another example of bilingual signage combining Indonesian and Mandarin within Glodok's linguistic landscape. The phrase “*Toko Obat Bintang Selatan*” (Southern Star Medicine Shop) is prominently displayed in large print at the center, ensuring visibility to a broad audience. On the left and right sides of the sign, smaller Hànzì characters appear: 南行 (*Nán xíng*, “Southern Star”) and 药行 (*Yào xíng*, “Medicine Shop”). The presence of these Chinese characters serves as a cultural marker, signaling both the owner's Chinese heritage and the availability of traditional Chinese medicine.

Multilingual Signs

Multilingual signs are the least common, representing only 5 signs (7.46%). These combine Indonesian, English, and Mandarin, aiming to maximize communication reach in areas frequented by both international tourists and the local Chinese community. Although limited in number, these signs play a strategic role in projecting Glodok as a multicultural and welcoming destination for visitors from various linguistic backgrounds.

Figure 18
Multilingual signs in Glodok Chinatown

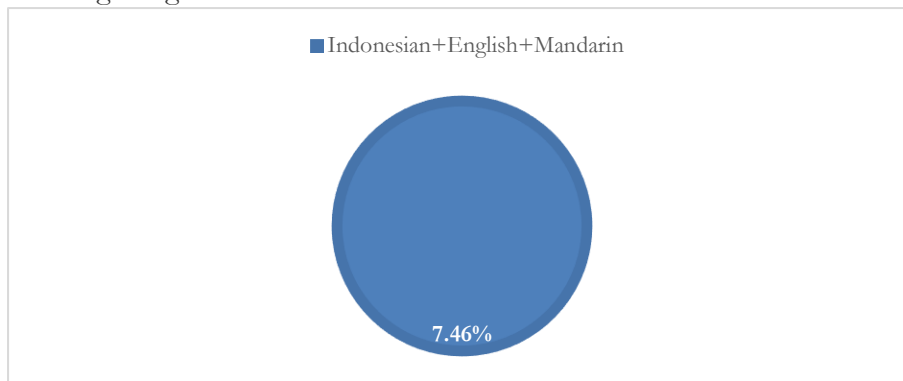


Figure 18 shows that multilingual signs account for only 7.46% of the total signage in Glodok Chinatown, all of which feature a single language combination: Indonesian + English + Mandarin. This limited variety indicates that multilingualism in public signage is far less common compared to monolingual and bilingual forms. The choice of Indonesian reflects its role as the official language, while the inclusion of English serves to appeal to a broader, possibly international audience. Meanwhile, Mandarin highlights the cultural and historical identity of the local Chinese community. The dominance of this single trilingual combination suggests that multilingual signs are strategically used in contexts where both local cultural values and international accessibility are prioritized. The following are some examples that illustrate these patterns.

Figure 19
Pancoran Tea House



Source: (Author's documentation)

In Figure 19, the central element of the sign is the English phrase “Pancoran Tea House”. The use of English can be interpreted as the owner’s intention to attract a wider range of customers across different backgrounds, as discussed in the earlier section. Above this phrase, however, there is text written in Hànzì: 汲泉茶舍 (*Jí quán chá shě*), which reflects the Chinese ethnic identity historically associated with the establishment. In addition, Indonesian is also present on the signage, serving as a reminder of the historical development of Glodok Chinatown.

The Pancoran Tea House has also become a landmark and symbolic gateway to the Pancoran Glodok area. Historically, this site functioned as a traditional Chinese medicine shop before its transformation into a tea house (Alfandy & Krisnadi, 2023). The layering of English, Chinese characters, and Indonesian on the sign illustrates not only multilingual practices but also the fusion of cultural and historical identities within Glodok’s linguistic landscape.

Figure 20

Kopi Es Tak Kie



Source: (Author's documentation)

Figure 20 presents a different emphasis, centering on the name “*Tak Kie*”, which has long served as the identity of this coffee shop. Established in 1927, as indicated on its signboard, the shop was founded by a Chinese immigrant from Guangzhou named Liong Kwie Tjong. The phrase “*Kopi Es*” (“iced coffee”) was added to the signage in response to growing demand for iced coffee in the community from the very beginning of the shop’s history (Hidayah et al., 2023). The sign also features Hànzì: 德記茶室 (*Dé jì cháshì*), which reinforces the shop’s strong Chinese identity. The combination of Indonesian and Chinese script in this case reflects both the cultural heritage of the owner and the linguistic adaptation to local consumer preferences. *Kopi Es Tak Kie* thus stands as a representation of continuity, heritage, and adaptation in Glodok’s linguistic landscape.

DISCUSSION

The findings indicate a clear dominance of bilingual signage (47.76%), with the Indonesian–Mandarin combination emerging as the most common form. This configuration reflects both national integration and the preservation of ethnic identity, aligning with Landry and Bourhis’ (1997) framework, which interprets the linguistic landscape (LL) as simultaneously a communicative tool and a symbolic marker of identity and power. Pertiwi and Mulyono’s (2021) study in Jombang similarly highlights the dual function of LL, serving not only to facilitate communication (informational function) but also to signify collective identity and sociocultural power (symbolic function). Consequently, Glodok is not merely a space of commercial communication but also a symbolic arena where nationality and ethnicity are continuously negotiated.

The presence of Indonesian monolingual signage (26.87%) reflects compliance with the Regulation of the President of the Republic of Indonesia Number 63 in 2019, on the use of the Indonesian language (Regulation of The President of the Republic of Indonesia Number 63 in 2019). This finding parallels the study of Mahayana et al. (2022) in Denpasar, which documented the implementation of Government Regulation of Bali No. 80/2018 (2018) mandating the inclusion of Balinese and Indonesian in public signage. In this sense, the use of Indonesian within the linguistic landscape operates as a strategy of state legitimization. Meanwhile, Mandarin monolingual signage (8.96%) underscores Chinese cultural identity, resembling the murals and shop signs in Kya-Kya Surabaya that display Chinese symbols as markers of ethnic rootedness (Eliza et al., 2025; Linuwih et al., 2025).

Multilingual signage (Indonesian–Mandarin–English) in Glodok constructs a hybrid image that is simultaneously local, ethnic, and global. Backhaus (2006) refers to this phenomenon as *cultural capital*, a notion also emphasized in the study of Kya-Kya Surabaya’s revitalization, where multilingual markers not only enhanced cultural heritage value but also strengthened the area’s tourism appeal. Thus, the linguistic landscape functions not merely as a tool of communication but also as an economic strategy and a symbol of social status.

The use of Hokkien and Minangkabau terms demonstrates that the linguistic landscape serves as a space for cross-ethnic expression. This finding is consistent with research in Kampung Bugis, Banten, which shows that toponyms and local naming practices represent the history of migration and the inherited ethnic identities of the community (Perdana et al., 2024). In other words, language in the LL does not merely reflect market orientation but also embodies the community's "collective memory."

The presence of *musholla* signage in Arabic and vihara signage in Mandarin characters reinforces Scollon and Scollon's (2003) argument that the linguistic landscape is a semiotic space that preserves historical traces, religious pluralism, and negotiations of power. A similar pattern was observed in Jombang (known as a *santri* city), where the use of Latinized Arabic on public signs underscores Islamic identity within the urban sphere (Pertiwi & Mulyono, 2021). In Glodok, the coexistence of Arabic, Mandarin, and Indonesian signage illustrates cross-religious cohabitation in the public space.

The presence of English monolingual signage (7.46%) and Indonesian–English bilingual signage reflects strategies of modernity and marketing. This finding resonates with Kweldju's (2017) study in Malang, which conceptualizes English as a *branded language*—employed not merely for communication, but to convey prestige, modernity, and global orientation. In Glodok, this confirms the function of English as both a means of attracting tourists and a symbolic marker appealing to younger generations.

Overall, the distribution of languages in Glodok reflects multiple layers of meaning. Indonesian emerges as the legitimized national language, Mandarin signifies ethnic continuity and commercial targeting, and English functions as a bridge to modernity and global markets. Dialects such as Hokkien, regional languages such as Minang, and religious languages such as Arabic add further symbolic richness, constructing Glodok as a mosaic of linguistic practices. In this sense, the linguistic landscape of Glodok Chinatown does not merely facilitate communication but actively mirrors broader sociocultural processes, including identity negotiation, economic strategy, intergenerational change, and historical continuity, thereby affirming Glodok as a dynamic representation of multicultural Jakarta, where local traditions, national language ideologies, and global flows converge.

CONCLUSION

The linguistic landscape (LL) of Glodok Chinatown vividly illustrates the area's distinctive cultural diversity and multilingual character. The findings reveal that language use in public spaces functions not only as a tool for communication but also as a marker of identity, history, and economic strategy. The dominance of bilingual signage, particularly the Indonesian–Mandarin combination, reflects the enduring cultural and linguistic ties of the Chinese ethnic community while simultaneously maintaining Indonesian as a symbol of national identity in accordance with state language policy. At the same time, the presence of English on commercial signboards underscores its role as an international *lingua franca* with significant marketing value. English is strategically deployed to appeal to a wider consumer base, including local non-Chinese groups and international visitors, thereby projecting an image of modernity and competitiveness. Meanwhile, the use of other languages such as Japanese, Korean, Arabic, and Minangkabau enriches the multilingual atmosphere, highlighting the contribution of different ethnic and religious communities to Glodok's sociocultural identity. This study further demonstrates that Glodok's LL is fundamentally bilingual-driven, shaped by the dynamic interplay between Indonesian as a unifying national language and Mandarin as an ethnic-cultural marker. Monolingual and multilingual practices provide additional depth, capturing layers of meaning tied to national policies, commercial strategies, diaspora heritage, and multicultural tolerance. Ultimately, Glodok Chinatown's LL does not merely record linguistic diversity but also represents a symbolic landscape of cultural negotiation, identity construction, and market orientation. As such, Glodok emerges as both a commercial hub and a multicultural public space, enhancing its appeal for residents and visitors alike. While this study provides valuable insights into the linguistic landscape of Glodok Chinatown, it is limited by its relatively small sample size (67 signs), narrow geographic scope, and focus solely on visible signage without incorporating ethnographic perspectives, diachronic analysis, or advanced multimodal methods. These constraints restrict the generalizability of the findings and

overlook the deeper social, historical, and semiotic dimensions of language use. Future research should therefore expand coverage to other Chinatowns in Indonesia for comparative insights, integrate interviews and participant observation to capture motivations and perceptions, adopt longitudinal approaches to track changes over time, and employ multimodal as well as quantitative analyses to enrich interpretation. In addition, future studies should include interviews and observations, examine changes in signage over time and in visual elements such as design and layout, and compare Glodok with other Chinatowns or multicultural urban areas to deepen understanding of linguistic landscapes and their social meanings.

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CONFLICT OF INTEREST STATEMENT:

The authors of the manuscript affirm that they have no conflicting interests.

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