

# *Linguistic Landscape at University of Malaya in Kuala Lumpur*

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**Keywords:** Linguistic Landscape, University of Malaya, multilingualism

**Abstract:** This research analyzed Linguistic Landscape (LL) at the University of Malaya (UM) and showed the language ideology and phenomenon of multilingualism at the UM. This study used field research and interview methods to present the leading role of Malay and English and explore the phenomenon of multilingualism that reflects the language policy and multiculturalism in Malaysia. The result shows that Malay is the major language in the LL of UM. English plays an important role in the academic environment. Multilingual signs increased cultural identity and cross-cultural understanding. This research revealed the multilingual policy of Malaysia and provided a reference to the LL of other multilingual environments.

## **1. Introduction**

### **1.1 Background**

With the development of globalization, communication and cooperation around the world have become increasingly close, and the coexistence of multilingualism in the same space has become normal<sup>[1]</sup>. Linguistic Landscape (LL) research, as an emerging research field in sociolinguistics, is gradually gaining attention from academics<sup>[2]</sup>. Malaysia is a multicultural, multilingual, and multiethnic country. University of Malaya (UM) is a prime institution of high education in Malaysia. Its pattern of language use and communication reflect the uniqueness of the academic environment and cultural exchange<sup>[3]</sup>.

### **1.2 Research Objectives**

- 1) To investigate the major languages in the LL of UM.
- 2) To analyze the number of languages and types of language signs in UM.
- 3) To explore the language ideologies behind these LLs.

### **1.3 Research Questions**

- 1) What are the main languages used in the LL of UM?
- 2) What are the number of languages and the types of language signs in UM?
- 3) What is the language ideology behind these LLs?

## 2. Methodology

This study is mixed-method research. It uses the following two methods to collect and get the data to thoroughly answer the above three research questions and reach the three research objectives.

### 2.1 Field Research Method

The researcher used field photography to collect data at UM. I took photos of the main signs in a 550-meter walk from the Faculty of Languages and Linguistics to the main library. 85 photos were collected both indoors and outdoors, and after selecting, 6 invalid and repeated photos were deleted and 79 valid photos were saved. The valid photos were then categorized and analyzed by the researcher to further understand the different language usage of signs within UM. This method of data collection will help to answer the first and second research questions comprehensively and reach the first and second research objectives.

### 2.2 Interview Method

The researcher designed three interview questions about language ideology and randomly selected 10 students from different majors and different degrees in UM to conduct the interviews. First, the researcher explained to them about the LL and language ideology and then interviewed them after they had acquired the relevant knowledge. Through these three interview questions, the researcher was able to deeply explore the language ideologies in the LL of UM and understand how these ideologies are expressed through signage and influence language use and cultural identity in UM. This will help to answer the third research question comprehensively and reach the third research objective.

1. What language ideologies do you think are reflected in the LL (e.g., signs, advertisements, announcements, etc.) in UM? How do these language ideologies influence the choice of signage language?
2. How do you feel about the existence of multilingual signs on campus? Do these signs reflect the superiority or privileged status of a particular language? Please provide specific examples.
3. How do you think these language signs affect students' language habits and cultural identity? Does this have a positive or negative impact on the multicultural atmosphere on campus?

## 3. Results

Through field photography and interviews with the LL at UM, the researcher collected and analyzed 81 valid photos as well as interview transcripts to get the following key results:

### 3.1 Main language in the signs

In monolingual and multilingual signs, the main language is the one placed at the top or center of the sign, and the non-main language is the one placed at the bottom or on either side<sup>[4]</sup>.

For the monolingual signs in Table 1, Malay (Roman scripts) is the most primarily used with 57% of the total signs, followed by English with 43%. Figure 1 and Figure 2 are two typical examples of monolingual signs for Malay and English as the main language.

Table 1: Main languages in the monolingual signs

Language	Number	Percentage
Malay (Roman scripts)	13	57%
English	10	43%
Chinese	/	/
Other languages	/	/
Total	23	100%



Figure 1: A monolingual sign for Malay as a main language



Figure 2: A monolingual sign for English as a main language

For the bilingual and multilingual signs in Table 2, Malay (Roman scripts) is the most commonly used, with 93% of the total signs, followed by English at 7%. Figure 3 and Figure 4 are two typical examples of bilingual and multilingual signs for Malay as a main language.

Table 2: Main languages in bilingual and multilingual signs

Language	Number	Percentage
Malay (Roman scripts)	52	93%
English	4	7%
Chinese	/	/
Other languages	/	/
Total	56	100%



Figure 3: A bilingual sign for Malay as a main language



Figure 4: A multilingual sign for Malay as a main language

### 3.2 Different language in the signs

#### 3.2.1 The Number of Languages in the signs

For the monolingual signs in Table 3, 16% were in single Malay and 13% in single English, showing the importance of Malay as the official language of this country. Bilingual signs usually appear as Malay and English (58%), with English usually coming after Malay, with similar font sizes and colors. Multilingual signs are less common, with 3% of signs containing Malay, English, and Chinese, with Chinese usually coming at the end and in a relatively small font size. 4% of signs contain Malay, Chinese, Tamil, and Jawi, with Jawi usually coming at the end. Figure 5, Figure 6, and Figure 7 are three typical examples of monolingual, bilingual, and multilingual signs.

Table 3: The Number of Languages

Number of Language	Language	Number	percentage
Monolingual	Malay (Roman scripts)	13	16%
	English	10	13%
Bilingual	Malay (Roman scripts)&English	46	58%
	Malay (Roman scripts)&Chinese	1	1%
	Malay (Roman scripts)&Jawi	1	1%
	Malay (Roman scripts)&Tamil	1	1%
	English&Chinese	2	3%
Multilingual	Malay (Roman scripts), English, and Chinese	2	3%
	Malay (Roman scripts), Chinese, Tamil, and Jawi	3	4%



Figure 5: A monolingual sign in Malay Roman scripts



Figure 6: A bilingual sign in Malay Roman scripts followed by English



Figure 7: A multilingual sign in Malay Roman scripts followed by English and Chinese

### 3.2.2 The Types of Language Signs: Top-down and Bottom-up

In Table 4, the majority (93%) of the language signs in UM are of the Top-down (Official) type, and only a very small number (7%) are of the Bottom-up (Non-official) type. In the Top-down signs, the bilingual sign in Malay and English is the most frequent, with 57%. Figure 8 is a typical example of a bilingual Top-down sign. Figure 9 is a typical example of a monolingual Bottom-up

sign.

Table 4: The Types of Language Signs

Number of Language	Language	Top-down	Bottom-up
Monolingual	Malay (Roman scripts)	12(15%)	1(1%)
	English	7(9%)	3(4%)
Bilingual	Malay (Roman scripts)&English	45(57%)	1(1%)
	Malay (Roman scripts)&Chinese	/	1(1%)
	Malay (Roman scripts)&Jawi	1(1%)	/
	Malay (Roman scripts)&Tamil	/	1(1%)
	English&Chinese	2(3%)	/
Multilingual	Malay (Roman scripts), English, and Chinese	2(3%)	/
	Malay (Roman scripts), Chinese, Tamil, and Jawi	3(4%)	/



Figure 8: A bilingual Top-down sign



Figure 9: A monolingual Bottom-up sign

### 3.3 Results of the interviews

As for language ideology, 80% of the participants believed that the LL of UM reflects the



multiculturalism of Malaysia as well as the dominance of Malay as the official language. 60% of the participants mentioned that the widely used English language reflects its importance in international communication and the academic environment.

When it comes to linguistic superiority, 30% of the participants believed that the order and font size of the Malay and English in the bilingual signs reflected some degree of linguistic superiority, especially the priority display and prominence of the Malay, which emphasized its importance.

Regarding cultural identity, 40% of the participants agreed that the multilingual signs had a positive impact on the cultural identity of the students, especially those who were able to see the signage in their own mother tongue and expressed a stronger sense of belonging to the campus. 30% of respondents also felt that multilingual signs promoted intercultural understanding and tolerance.

## 4. Discussion

Through the field study, it was found that the main language used for language signs on UM was Malay (Roman scripts), followed by English. This finding is aligned with Malaysia's national language policy that Malay has a superior status as an official language, while English is also widely used as an important language in international communication and academic environments.

The number of languages on the signs reflects the linguistic diversity on campus. The results of the study showed that monolingual signs were mainly in Malay and English, while bilingual signs were predominantly in Malay and English, and multilingual signs were relatively few. This indicates that although there are many languages on campus, Malay and English are still dominant, especially the importance of Malay in official signs.

From the type of signs (Top-down and Bottom-up), the language signs on campus are mainly developed and managed by official organizations, reflecting the dominance of the Malay language at the official level. Among the Top-down signs, bilingual signs in Malay and English are the most common. In contrast, Bottom-up signs reflect the language usage of students and non-official institutions. Although they are fewer in number, they show the linguistic and cultural diversity on campus.

The interviews' results showed the LL has an impact on the application of languages by students and creates cultural identity. Multilingual signs not only improve multiculturalism but also increase a sense of belonging. The finding indicated multilingualism has a positive influence on academic and cultural communication.

## 5. Conclusions

### 5.1 Implications

This research investigated the major language and arrangement of the LL in UM. It reflected the features of multiculturalism and multilingualism in Malaysia. These signs showed the language policy, promoted cross-cultural communication, and increased cultural identity<sup>[5]</sup>.

### 5.2 Limitations

This research has some limitations. Firstly, the range of data collection is 550 meters by walking in UM. A small sample size may not present the situation of the LL in the whole UM. Secondly, the sample size of the interview was small. There are 10 participants. They might not represent the views of all students. Thirdly, the data for this research is from interviews and photos. It lacked a quantitative analysis of the effectiveness of the LL.

### 5.3 Suggestions

The research in this field in the future can expand the range of collecting data and cover more areas of the UM to get more comprehensive data on the LL.

At the same time, the research is able to increase the sample size of interviews. The researcher needs to investigate the effectiveness of applying the language signs.

In addition, the study can explore the long-term impact of different types of language signs on students' linguistic habits and cultural identity, as well as how linguistic diversity and cultural diversity on campus can be promoted through language policies and educational measures. Through further research, this study is likely to provide a more comprehensive perspective for understanding LL and the language ideologies behind it in UM and also provide references for other studies on LL in multilingual environments.

### References

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