

Language Diversity of Hotel Signage: Insights from Surabaya

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Abstract

This study explores the language diversity in hotel signage in Surabaya, Indonesia. The hotel signage can be met at many places in the areas of hotels and provides guidelines for their guests during staying at the hotel. The aim of this study is to explore language diversity in hotel signage in the hotels. To describe the use of language diversity in hotel signage, this study was designed in the frame of the qualitative case study in which the data were collected through on-site observation and taking the photos of hotel signage in the areas of hotels. The study found five types of signage that are used at the hotels, such as identification signage, directional signage, informational signage, orientation signage, and regulatory signage. This study provides insight into the importance of language diversity in the hotel industry and the need for the hotels to give information through diversities of language signage to their guests. This study indicates the language diversity in hotel signage through the use of multiple registers, reflecting how hotels adjust language choices based on situational context and the anticipated interpretation by diverse guests.

Keywords: *hotel signage, language diversity, register*

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INTRODUCTION

Signage is a visual information system that focuses on providing instructions and guidance (Kusumarini et al., 2012; Tafuzi & Susanto, 2023). It consists of signs displaying words or sentences related to a company, building, institution, etc., and is typically placed on building walls as markers or indicators. Signage involves the design and utilization of signs and symbols to convey information effectively. It is commonly employed to improve the accessibility of navigating complex buildings. The primary purpose of signs is communication, as they serve to provide information that helps individuals make informed decisions. According to Kusumarini et al., (2012), signage is necessary for all visitors in public spaces, as it offers language-based information and guidance. This is crucial because each building has its own set of instructions, and without signage, visitors may not be well-informed about the layout and purpose of the building.

In the context of signage, a register plays a significant role as a prominent element that aims to capture the attention of visitors and provide them with essential information. Register refers to the specific style and language choices used in

communication, determined by the context and the particular field or topic being discussed (Pratiwi & Susanto, 2022). Moreover, Eckert and Rickford in Cheshire (2007) elaborated on the function of registers, stating that registers serve to embody the distinctive features and language patterns associated with specific fields.

The register used in the hotel is a reliable source of information that guides visitors throughout their stay and ensures a seamless experience from coming to leaving. Hotels are places that offer comprehensive accommodation services, including reception and rooms with private facilities, along with additional amenities such as onsite restaurants, room service, and bars (Jimenez, 2012). It may also provide business facilities such as conference rooms. Hotels are a significant part of the tourism industry, offering a wide range of services. Given the multitude of hotels available with varying types and prices, the researcher believes that the quality and rating of each hotel may also reflect in their signage.

The hospitality industry plays a crucial role in accommodating tourists visiting a particular location, and hotels are responsible for providing comprehensive information and guidelines for their guests (Jamal Ali et al., 2021). One of the crucial aspects of adequate communication in a hotel is the signage. Signage is vital in providing information to guests, such as directions, warnings, or instructions. Signage not only helps guests navigate their way around the hotel premises but also gives a first impression of the hotel's quality of services (Santos & Taguam, 2019). Therefore, it's crucial for hotels to have signage that caters to the linguistic diversity of their guests.

To cater to the guests' language diversities, hotels need to consider the languages spoken by their potential guests and provide signage in those languages. Some hotels use a one-size-fits-all approach and provide signage only in the official language of the country where the hotel is located (Agbaglo & Afful, 2023). However, this approach may not always work as some guests may not understand or feel comfortable with the official language. Therefore, hotels must prioritize guest satisfaction by providing signage in the languages spoken by the significant number of guests or potential guests. By doing so, they can help guests feel more comfortable and improve their hotel's reputation (Jamal Ali et al., 2021).

The language diversity of hotel signage also depends on the location of the hotel. For example, hotels in major cities with a high influx of international tourists may require more diverse signage than those in remote or rural areas (Nguyen, 2021). Similarly, hotels that cater to specific markets, such as business or luxury travelers, may require a different approach to their signage (Martín et al., 2020). As tourism continues to grow as an industry, linguistic diversity has become an essential aspect of hotels' communication strategies. A significant part of hotel communication takes place through signage, which serves as a tool for providing information, direction, and guidance to guests (Santos & Taguam, 2019).

In addition to conveying information, signage also serves the purpose of providing instructions to visitors or individuals present in a particular location. It serves as a form of non-verbal or written communication and may include prohibitions, motivational messages, slogans, or guidance (Katamba, 1994). Therefore, signage can take the form of words, phrases, or longer expressions, depending on the content and purpose of the signage.

This study just focuses on the types of language diversity on hotel signage in which hotel signage serves as a variety of forms of language that are commonly used in the industry and contains information that is easily understood by hotel guests in the hotel area.

RESEARCH METHOD

Approach for this study was a qualitative case study in which it tried to investigate and concentrate on one or more cases over time through comprehensive data collection involving various sources such as textual and visual to the case (Creswell, 2014). In this study, the researchers gathered data using visual resources in the form of signage photos, which contained textual information. When analyzing the data, the researchers adopted descriptive analysis. As described by Sandelowski (2010), descriptive analysis involves analyzing the data based on the researchers' subjective understanding and experience. In this particular study, the data were derived from the words or phrases found on the hotel signage. The data source of this research comprised the hotels from which the data were collected in which the collection of the data utilized purposive sampling (Clarah et al., 2023; Dan et al., 2021). This sampling technique ensures that the hotels were representative samples that provide the data for the research or analysis purposes. Thus, the data for this research were collected from the signage of hotels in Surabaya, Indonesia. While there are multiple analysis guidelines available, Sandelowski (2010) outlines a few steps for analyzing the data in qualitative descriptive research. Firstly, the data is organized into signage groups. Next, the meanings of the data are verified using Oxford Online and Cambridge, along with brief explanations from staff members. Lastly, the researchers provide an explanation of the data, offer general comments based on the findings, and present the main conclusion derived from the data analysis.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

RESULTS

In this part, we are going to address five findings based on the data of hotel signage taken from the hotels in Surabaya. There are 5 types of signage already identified based on the analysis conducted during the exploration. These signage types can be categorized based on the linguistic structure, including single words, phrases, and long expressions. The five types of hotel signage are as follows:

Identification Signage

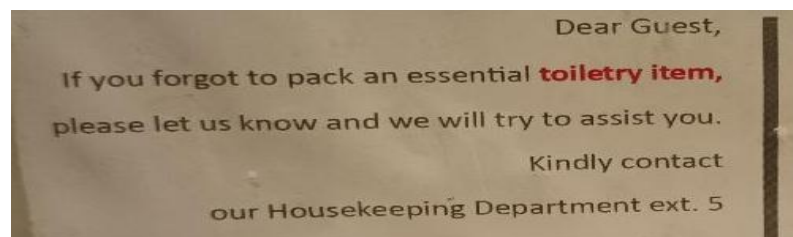
Identification signage refers to visual elements or displays that are used to identify and provide information about a particular place, object, or concept. These signs are designed to communicate key details and help individuals quickly and easily identify and understand what visitors or guests are looking at. Gibson (2009) explored the importance of identification signage in various contexts, such as public spaces, buildings, and transportation systems. Identification signage plays a crucial role in various contexts, including public spaces, transportation systems, buildings, and facilities. Identification signage contains the name of the place or space located indoors and outdoors of the hotel. The signs are categorized as single words, phrasal words, and long expressions during the taking of the data. But for the long expression, it will take the keyword, then divide it into single words and phrasal units. There were forty-one registers from single words and phrases, then sixteen long expressions consisting of seventeen keywords from single words and phrases as registers.



Source: Hotels' Signage Photo from Hotel G

Figure 1. "Reception" Signage

In the context of a hotel, the word "*Reception*" refers to the designated area or desk where guests are received and attended to by hotel staff. It serves as the central point for guest check-in, check-out, and general assistance during their stay. The reception area is often prominently located near the entrance of the hotel and is typically staffed 24/7. It is where guests can approach staff members to inquire about room availability, make reservations, request information about hotel facilities and services, seek recommendations for local attractions, report any issues or complaints, and receive assistance with various other matters related to their stay.



Source: Hotels' Signage Photo from Hotel P

Figure 2. "Toiletry item" phrase

Another example from the phrase is Toiletry Item. The phrase "*Toiletry item*" could be used as identification signage in the hotel to indicate the location or presence of these personal care products. It helps guests easily locate and identify the designated area where they can find the toiletry items they may need during their stay. In the context of a hotel, the phrase "*toiletry item*" refers to personal care products provided to guests for their convenience and use during their stay. These items are typically found in the guest rooms or bathrooms and are meant to enhance the guest's comfort and hygiene.



Source: Hotels' Signage Photo from Hotel V

Figure 3. "Put your key card on the panel below" expression

The long expression “Put your key card on the panel below” in which include a phrase “*Key Card*” is also could be used as identification signage in the hotel to indicate the location or function of key card-related services, such as key card issuance, replacement, or troubleshooting. The “*key card*” typically contains a magnetic stripe or a chip that stores encoded information, allowing it to be read and recognized by the electronic locks installed on guest room doors. When a guest inserts or swipes their key card in the designated card reader on the door lock, it grants them entry to their room.

Directional Signage

Directional signage refers to visual cues or displays that guide individuals through a physical space, providing clear instructions and indicating the correct path or direction to reach a specific destination or area. These signs play a critical role in helping people navigate unfamiliar environments, such as hotels, airports, shopping malls, or hospitals. This signage is coordinated for easy navigation through the facilities. Same as the identification signage, this is also categorized as single words, phrasal words, and long expressions during the data that has been taken. There were forty-five registers from single words and phrasal.



Source: Hotels' Signage Photo from Hotel G

Figure 4. “In” and “Out” signage

In the context of a parking area in a hotel, the words “*In*” and “*Out*” are commonly used as directional signage to indicate the entrances and exits for vehicles. These signs help guide drivers to the appropriate points of entry and exit in the parking facility, ensuring smooth traffic flow and easy navigation for guests. The sign with the word “*In*” typically marks the entrance or driveway where vehicles enter the parking area. It signifies the point at which drivers should enter the facility to find available parking spaces. On the other hand, the sign with the word “*Out*” is placed at the exit or the designated exit lane in the parking area. It indicates the point where vehicles should proceed when leaving the parking facility.



Source: Hotels' Signage Photo from Hotel V

Figure 5. “Drop Point” phrase

Another example, the phrase "*Drop Point*" refers to a designated area where guests can temporarily stop their vehicles to unload luggage, passengers, or other belongings. It serves as a convenient spot for guests to quickly drop off items or passengers before proceeding to park their vehicles in the designated parking area. The "*drop point*" is often located near the entrance of the hotel or near the lobby. It is typically marked with directional signage to guide guests to the appropriate area. This signage helped guests easily identify and locate the designated area for temporary vehicle stops. It ensures a smooth and efficient process for unloading luggage and passengers, providing convenience and ease of access for hotel guests.

Informational Signage

Informational signage refers to visual displays or signs that convey specific information, instructions, or guidelines to individuals in a clear and concise manner. These signs are designed to provide relevant details and communicate specific messages to help people understand and engage with their surroundings effectively. This signage could be found in various settings, such as public spaces, educational institutions, workplaces, and transportation systems. They serve as a means of communication and provide important information to individuals, promoting safety, awareness, and understanding. Information signage is an indicator of a source of information, or may itself be informative. Typical information signs include information boards, traffic signs, pointers to a help desk (such as in a public library, a railway station, or an airport), or indicators in reference materials.

Informational signage relates to the provision of information about the entire facility. These signs provide people with the extensive information they need when navigating. Informational signage must be universally understood at a glance; signs and symbols have been simplified so anyone can easily understand. This language was also categorized as a single word, a phrasal, and a long expression during the data collection. The researcher has found twenty-one single words and phrasal verbs, while the long expression has found seventeen.



Source: Hotels' Signage Photo from Hotel G

Figure 6. "Warning" signage

In the context of informational signage in a hotel, the word "*Warning*" is used to convey important cautionary information or potential risks to guests. Warning signs are typically placed in areas where there may be specific hazards or safety concerns that guests need to be aware of. The word "*Warning*" serves as a visual cue that grabs attention and prompts individuals to pay careful attention to the information presented on the signage. It signals that there may be potential risks or safety measures that guests should be aware of in that particular area.



Source: Hotels' Signage Photo from Hotel G

Figure 7. "Break Glass" phrase

In the context of informational signage in a hotel, the phrase "*Break Glass*" is typically used in emergency situations to indicate the presence of emergency equipment or devices that should be accessed by breaking a glass panel or cover. It is commonly associated with emergency alarm systems or fire safety equipment. The phrase "*Break Glass*" serves as a clear instruction to individuals that, in case of an emergency, they should break the glass barrier to access the equipment or device behind it. The glass is often designed to be easily shattered, allowing quick access to the emergency equipment.



Source: Hotels' Signage Photo from Hotel P

Figure 8. "These premises are under CCTV surveillance" expression

The long expression "These premises are under CCTV surveillance" in which include a phrase "*CCTV Surveillance*" is used to indicate the presence of closed-circuit television cameras that are actively monitoring and recording the area. These cameras are used for surveillance and security purposes, helping to deter potential incidents and assist in investigating any security-related incidents that may occur on the premises. The phrase "*CCTV Surveillance*" on signage serves as a clear indication to guests and visitors that their activities may be captured and monitored by security cameras within the hotel premises. It is a way to inform individuals that the area is under video surveillance, emphasizing the importance of security and potentially deterring unauthorized or inappropriate behavior. This signage is typically placed in prominent locations throughout the hotel, such as entrances, lobbies, corridors, or public areas, to ensure visibility and awareness among guests and visitors.

Orientation Signage

Orientation signage refers to visual displays or signs that provide individuals with an overall understanding of their location within a larger environment or complex. These signs help people orient themselves, grasp the layout, and determine their position in relation to key landmarks, points of interest, or specific areas. The content of orientation signage typically includes maps, diagrams, symbols, directional arrows, or other visual cues that help individuals establish a mental representation of the environment. They may also indicate the location of amenities, facilities, or services, enabling people to navigate with confidence.

Orientation signage is an effective means to assist people who have difficulty navigating their environment because it contains a map for users. This signage is most effective. The signage is large, with bright, contrasting colors that feature words and symbols, so that it is suitable for people with dementia who are becoming disoriented. This signage should be placed at eye height and preferably on the door it relates to the floor. Large freestanding units are usually readily visible to the guest simultaneously or wall-mounted if space does not allow it. According to the data, the researcher found one phrase of this signage "*Emergency Way Out*".



Source: Hotels' Signage Photo from Hotel G

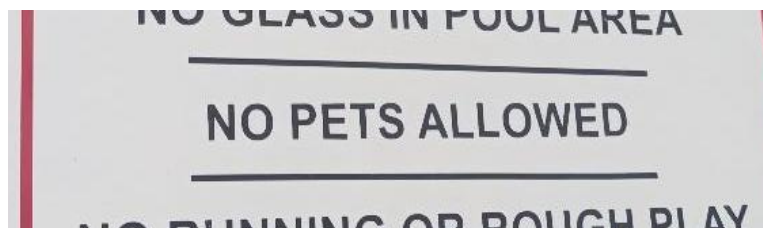
Figure 9. "Emergency Way Out" phrase

Actually, the phrase "*Emergency Way Out*" is not typically used as orientation signage in a hotel. It is primarily associated with emergency evacuation routes and is used to indicate the location of exits that should be used in case of an emergency. As an orientation signage in a hotel, the focus is on providing directions and information to help guests navigate and find their way within the hotel premises. Orientation signage may include directional arrows, floor plans, room number indicators, and facility maps. These signs help guests understand the layout of the hotel, locate amenities, and find their desired destinations within the property.

Regulatory Signage

Regulatory signage refers to visual displays or signs that convey legal requirements, rules, or regulations that must be followed by individuals within a specific environment or jurisdiction. These signs are designed to inform and direct people regarding specific actions, restrictions, or obligations to ensure safety, compliance, and order. This signage could be found in various settings, including public roads, parking areas, construction sites, workplaces, and public facilities. They serve as a means of communication and enforcement, providing clear instructions and warnings

to individuals to prevent accidents, maintain order, and promote adherence to laws or regulations and also focused on safety and liability concerns and sets boundaries—what is and is not acceptable in your facilities. It is used to establish and reinforce rules, safety standards, and privacy expectations. It contains something that has to do or not for people. So, this signage should be unobtrusive and enhance the experience of a place but large enough to communicate instructions or warning information immediately. There were phrases and long expressions. The total of the Phrases found are nine and the Long Expression found twelve keywords and assigned them to Single Word and Phrasal Registers.



Source: Hotels' Signage Photo from Hotel G

Figure 10. "No Pets Allowed" phrase

In the context of regulatory signage in a hotel, the phrase "*No Pets Allowed*" is used to convey a policy that prohibits the presence of pets within the premises. This signage is typically displayed at the entrance or in prominent areas of the hotel to inform guests and visitors about the hotel's pet policy. The phrase "*No Pets Allowed*" serves as a clear and straightforward message that indicates that pets are not permitted within the hotel. It is designed to ensure compliance with the hotel's regulations and maintain the comfort and safety of all guests. This signage is particularly important for individuals who may be allergic to or uncomfortable around animals, as well as for maintaining cleanliness and preventing potential damage to the property caused by pets.



Source: Hotels' Signage Photo from Hotel G

Figure 11. "In case of emergency use emergency exit do not use lift"

The phrase "*Do Not Use Lift*" in the Long Expression of "In case of emergency use emergency exit do not use lift" could be considered regulatory signage in a hotel when there is a need to communicate that the elevator or lift is temporarily out of service or should not be used due to maintenance, safety concerns, or other specific reasons. This signage is important to ensure the safety of guests and staff by notifying them of the unavailability or inoperability of the elevator. It helps prevent individuals from attempting to use a non-functioning lift, which could result in accidents or inconvenience. By prominently displaying "*Do Not Use Lift*" signage near the elevator entrances or in areas where it is visible, hotels can effectively communicate the

temporary unavailability and direct individuals to alternative means of accessing different floors, such as stairwells or other available elevators. However, implementing this signage could be appropriate and providing clear instructions on alternative routes, hotels can help ensure the safety and convenience of guests and staff while maintenance or repairs are being carried out on the elevator.

DISCUSSION

The study of language diversity in hotel signage in Surabaya, Indonesia, employs a formal and academic register, as evidenced by precise terminology and structure analysis. It underscores the critical role that multilingual signage plays in enhancing guest experience and satisfaction. This formal tone is appropriate for a scholarly context, aiming to communicate research findings clearly and authoritatively (Pujiati et al., 2024). By identifying five types of signage – identification, directional, informational, orientation, and regulatory – the research utilizes technical vocabulary to categorize signage functions, which reflects a specialized and objective register. This classification highlights how each category serves a unique purpose in facilitating guest navigation and communication within the hotel environment. The categorization, according to (Tafuzi & Susanto, 2023), is crucial as it allows hotel management to strategically implement signage that not only meets regulatory requirements but also caters to the diverse linguistic needs of international guests. This use of evaluative and analytical language supports the informative and persuasive purposes typical of academic writing, aiming to influence professional practice based on research insights.

The language registers in hotel signage reveals the nuanced role that specific language choices play in effectively communicating with guests. Registers which refer to the style and language choices used in communication are crucial in capturing the attention of visitors and providing them with essential information. According to Firdaus (2023), registers can be seen and understood based on the contexts where they are used. In this context, the use of appropriate registers ensures that the information is not only accessible but also resonates with the diverse linguistic background of the guests. This is particularly important in a multicultural setting where hotels cater to a wide array of international tourists. By means of appropriate registers in hotel signage, hotels can enhance the clarity and effectiveness of their communication, thereby improving the overall guest experience.

This study also has significant implications for the field of linguistics, particularly in understanding how language functions in multicultural and multilingual contexts. What has been highlighted in this study is about the importance of language registers and their role in effective communication (Asmin, 2014; Arjulayana & Pujiati, 2024)), which is a key area of interest in sociolinguistics and pragmatics. By examining different types of signage in the hotels, this study provides insights into how language can be strategically employed to meet the communicative needs of diverse audiences. This underscores the necessity for linguists to consider not only the linguistic content but also the sociocultural context in which language is used.

Furthermore, this linguistic accuracy (register) in signage design reflects broader linguistic principles, particularly those concerning pragmatics, as it demonstrates how language use varies depending on context, purpose, and audience. For example, the use of formal, concise language in regulatory signage differs from the more welcoming tone in identification signs. The variation shows how the hotels adjust language choices based on situational context and anticipated interpretation by diverse guests. Offering a practical application of the registers in real-world settings, the study illustrates how

different levels of formality and tone are pragmatically motivated to ensure clarity, politeness, and functionality. For instance a sign that says “No Pets Allowed” uses polite imperative and indirectness to maintain politeness (Brown & Levinson, 1987). Thus, these findings contribute to a deeper understanding of how language operates in public space, where meaning must be communicated efficiently and inclusively to the guests of different languages and cultural backgrounds. This underscores the pragmatic need for shared understanding and relevance, as public signage often needs to be interpreted quickly and accurately, regardless of linguistic background. The implications for designing communication strategies that are both inclusive and effective rest on understanding pragmatic competence – the ability to use language appropriately in a given context. Hotel signage, when pragmatically informed, ensures not just literal understanding but also respectful and context-sensitive interaction between space and its users.

CONCLUSION

This study highlights the importance of language diversity in hotel signage, emphasizing the need for hotels to consider the languages spoken by their guests and provide signage in those languages to ensure effective communication. The findings reveal that there are five distinct groups of signage and each group serves a specific purpose in providing information, direction, and guidance to hotel guests. Moreover, this study brings attention to the significance of signage as a reflection of a hotels' quality and reputation, emphasizing the need for standardized and informative signage to enhance the overall guest experience. By understanding the different types and functions of signage, hotel staff might be making informed decisions to improve communication, facilitate navigation, and enhance guest satisfaction in their establishments. In conclusion, this research article explored the significance of signage in hotels and its impact on guest satisfaction and communication.

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