

VIRTUAL LINGUISTIC LANDSCAPES OF JALAN H. IMAM MUNANDAR: ANALYZING COMMERCIAL TOPONYMY AND TOPONYMIC COMMODIFICATION FOR TEFL RESOURCES

Imelda Yance¹,

¹ Andalas University/National Research and Innovation Agency, Indonesia,

✉ (e-mail) iyance69@gmail.com

Damsar²,

² Andalas University, Indonesia,

✉ (e-mail) damsar@soc.unand.ac.id

Bob Alfiandi³

³ Andalas University, Indonesia,

✉ (e-mail) bobalfiandi@gmail.com

Katubi⁴

⁴ National Research and Innovation Agency, Indonesia,

✉ (e-mail) obing.ktb@gmail.com

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ABSTRACT

This study examines how commercial entities navigate official street renamings through their signage and digital mapping presence. Data were collected along an 8.5 km commercial corridor of Jalan H. Imam Munandar (formerly known as Jalan Harapan Raya) in Pekanbaru, and cross-verified via virtual mapping platforms. The structural analysis reveals four distinct naming formulas, namely new, legacy, hybrid, and legacy-plus-directional addresses. More importantly, this study unpacks a significant sociolinguistic phenomenon driven by *toponymic attachment*. Local business owners do not simply display the old street names as a location marker, but actively absorb the old toponyms into their identity, resulting in *toponymic commodification*. The transformation of old names into economic assets serves as a tool of linguistic resistance to maintain digital readability and community trust in the midst of administrative street name changes from above. From an applied linguistic perspective, these four structural formulas along with the phenomenon of commodification driven by *toponymic attachment* serve as a valuable pedagogical resource of TEFL. Language educators can leverage this authentic local LL corpus to foster EFL students' Critical Language Awareness and multimodal literacy. This study concludes that the virtual and physical linguistic landscape is a dynamic ideological space, where community identities and pragmatic business needs meet.

Keywords: Linguistic Landscape (LL), Jalan H. Imam Munandar, Toponymic Commodification, Toponymic Attachment, TEFL Pedagogical Resources..

INTRODUCTION

The linguistic landscape (LL) in urban areas functions as an arena where language (linguistic aspect), space (landscape), and identity (symbolic) meet. Its function is not limited to the information aspect but also reaches the symbolic aspect. Various markers found in public spaces, such as commercial signs, street signs, building signs, parks, monuments contain this function. Such linguistic markers are not passive or neutral, but actively represent socio-political authority, cultural memory, and economic negotiation (Landry & Bourhis, 1997; Blommaert, 2012). This view can be found when the local government reorganizes the city (*urban rebranding*) by changing one of the linguistic markers in the city, such as the name of the street. Citizens' acceptance of the policy is diverse. Some residents use new names. Others combine the two names: the new name and the old name with a slash between them. In fact, some others still use the old names because they are used to it.

The study of contemporary linguistic landscapes has penetrated the digital space termed the *Virtual Linguistic Landscape* (VLL) (Ivkovic & Lotherington, 2009; Biró, 2018). Global mapping platforms such as Google Maps play an important role in representing and

standardizing geographical names, including street names. The platform influences the naming practices adopted by commercial parties (McQuire, 2019; Bharadwaj et al., 2026). In addition, the LL study also looked at multilingual practices and location-based content that are highly beneficial in social and economic life (Hiippala et al., 2019; Guarín & Cardoso, 2023). These developments show that the LL study is increasingly leading to an understanding of how digital technology works. LL mediates the relationship between language, space, and contemporary social practices (Felgenhauer, 2017).

However, attention to the phenomenon of linguistic persistence, such as the rejection of new street names set by the government, is still very limited. This research is here to fill this gap by analyzing the linguistic landscape on Jalan H. Imam Munandar, Pekanbaru City, Riau Province. The main corridor in Pekanbaru City is very popular and has established itself in the community as Jalan Harapan Raya. The local government's decision to rename the corridor after H. Imam Munandar, the prominent 5th Governor of Riau (1980–1988) who led significant infrastructure developments in the province, as a form of respect does not automatically remove the old name of

Harapan Raya. Old names show very strong linguistic resilience, both on the physical signage of the store and on the digital address.

Preliminary field observations along this corridor reveal a compelling spatial dynamic. Street names are varied, either on Google Maps or on physical signage. Official street names or those that are in accordance with the nomenclature are not fully adopted by business actors. This dualism cannot be considered administrative negligence or a digital mapping error. From a sociolinguistic perspective, such resistance highlights a distinct friction. It creates a space for negotiation, namely between bureaucratic

compliance and the pragmatic economic interests of business actors. The difference between official regulations from the government and the reality of the language of the people is the background of this study. Drawing from this issue, this study answers three questions, namely (1) how syntactic variations of commercial addresses are formed in digital space and physical space along the corridor of Jalan H. Imam Munandar; (2) why the name of the old street (*Harapan Raya*) still dominates the naming of business places in the area; and (3) how this linguistic landscape reflects the negotiation between formal government policies and the spatial memory of society?

REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

Conceptual Foundation of Linguistic Landscape

In their monumental work, Landry and Bourhis (1997) defined the linguistic landscape (LL) through the visibility and position of language on public and commercial signage in urban spaces. They distinguish between the informational and symbolic functions of the LL. The informational function is pragmatic. LL is used to mark geographical boundaries and navigation routes. In contrast, symbolic

functions act as markers of the status, strength, and presence of socio-political influence of a particular group. Based on this foundation, modern scientists now see LL no longer as a passive background, but as a dynamic arena where various actors compete with each other to project their identities into urban spaces (Blommaert, 2012).

The Dynamics of Street Renaming Processes

The renaming of the street does not simply update the map but serves as a tool to affirm political authority while reshaping the collective memory of the community. This policy is a form of spatial regulation that is *top-down*, not just an ordinary administrative adjustment (Spolsky, 2009). The friction in street renaming is a global phenomenon, as documented in post-socialist Bucharest (Light, 2004) and discussed within critical toponymy frameworks (Rose-Redwood et al., 2010). However, on the grounds, the implementation of these formal policies rarely runs smoothly. Empirical data suggest that such unilateral decisions can trigger passive resistance and cognitive friction among local citizens. This friction is in line with the findings of Justevani et al. (2026) regarding the dynamics of complex and nuanced urban spatial planning. In daily life, people tend to refuse to leave the old name. They reasoned that the old names had an emotional connection. The old name has become an integral part of the sociocultural routine and spatial memory of citizens.

Government Toponymy Policy versus Commercial Toponymy

Toponymic interventions carried out by the government sometimes face resistance from the commercial sector. Instead of simply complying with government mandates, business actors tend to assert their own linguistic autonomy through the selection of commercial toponymy. This friction can be understood through the theory of *Toponymic Attachment*. In this theory, Kostanski (2009) outlines how individuals and business entities build deep relationships with specific place names. The relationship is formed through three elements, namely psychological bonds, spatial dependence, and identity structure. In a highly competitive market, established street names are no longer just a neutral geographical direction. Instead, the street name has been commodified into a core brand identity and strategic marketing asset. For example, the name of a street that is already embedded in people's memory is massively integrated into business branding, ranging from physical stores to digital platforms. This display is repeatedly seen by consumers. They became more and more familiar with the look and strengthened the association of the street names. As a result, street

name changes by the government are rarely followed by instant updates to corporate naming practices. Maintaining an old name is considered much more profitable due to its long-term financial value and established reputation. Therefore, business actors are reluctant to

include new street names in their commercial addresses. This persistence confirms that the change of street names is actually a top-down institutional spatial regulation, and not just an administrative adjustment (Vuolteenaho & Berg, 2009).

METHODS

This study uses a qualitative-descriptive design with a linguistic landscape (LL) approach to map digital space as well as physical space. This method is used to explain dual characters in modern spatial communication. Specifically, the study examined how language is displayed on two different platforms: physical store signage and a virtual navigation system on Google Maps. Field data collection was carried out on Jalan H. Imam Munandar along 8.5 kilometers, Pekanbaru City, Riau. The line, which was previously called Jalan Harapan Raya, is very popular and sticks in the memory of the community.

mapping of business places along the corridor was carried out using the Google Maps platform. In this process, documentation of digital map displays, location pop-up information, and variations of digital address writing used by local business actors was carried out. In the second stage, physical observations were carried out in the field to match the digital data with the existing spatial reality. To ensure the validity of the data, this field observation was carried out in three rounds. During this verification process, we photograph commercial signage, government signage, and corporate branding.

Data Collection Techniques

Data collection in the field is carried out through two successive stages to see the gap between physical and virtual linguistic spaces. In the first stage, digital

Data Analysis Procedures

Data analysis was carried out inductively to map linguistic phenomena in the field. The first stage involved transcribing textual data, addresses, and

business names exactly as they appeared on physical signage and Google Maps. From the raw data collected, the emerging linguistic units were examined in depth and classified based on the characteristics of their syntactic structures. This step served to identify the typology of address writing variations that formed organically within the community. The compiled

linguistic data were then evaluated using the thematic frameworks of commercial toponymy and toponymic attachment (Kostanski, 2009; Vuolteenaho & Berg, 2009). Ultimately, this analysis focused on trademark names to explore how geographical names are commodified into economic assets along the research corridor.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

4.1 Structural Analysis of Commercial Signage

An analysis of the linguistic landscape along the corridor of Jalan H. Imam Munandar—historically known as Jalan Harapan Raya—shows that spatial language in public spaces is not uniform. Field data show significant variations in how street addresses are written. This difference in writing shows that there is an attraction between the use of the government's version of the new street name and the old street name chosen by the community. This dynamic indicates that urban spaces are not just passive backgrounds for material signs. Instead, the space serves as a contest arena where the government's official naming practices clash with the community's strong attachment to the old toponymy.

The textual and visual data corpus in this study was collected through spatial mapping on Google Maps and verified through three rounds of field observation. From the reading of the raw data, it was found that the variation of the writing was then crystallized into four different syntactic formulations. These four formulations include the strict official formula, the legacy naming formula, the hybrid address formula. In addition, there was also a variation of organic directions that adjusted to the local socio-spatial context. The distribution and characteristics of each of these categories are systematically summarized in Table 1.

Table 1. Address Syntax Variations

Formula Sintaksis	Example	Function
<i>Official Address Formula</i>	Jl. H. Imam Munandar	Bureaucratic Compliance
<i>Legacy Address Formula</i>	Jl. Harapan Raya	Defense of Memory and Brand Equity
<i>Hybrid Address Formula</i>	Jl. H. Imam Munandar / Harapan Raya	Spatial Compromise and Transition
<i>Directional Legacy Formula</i>	Jl. Harapan Raya Ujung	Community-Based Navigation (Peripheral)

The findings mapped in Table 1 show that address text can be grouped into four different syntactic formulas.

The Strict Official Formula

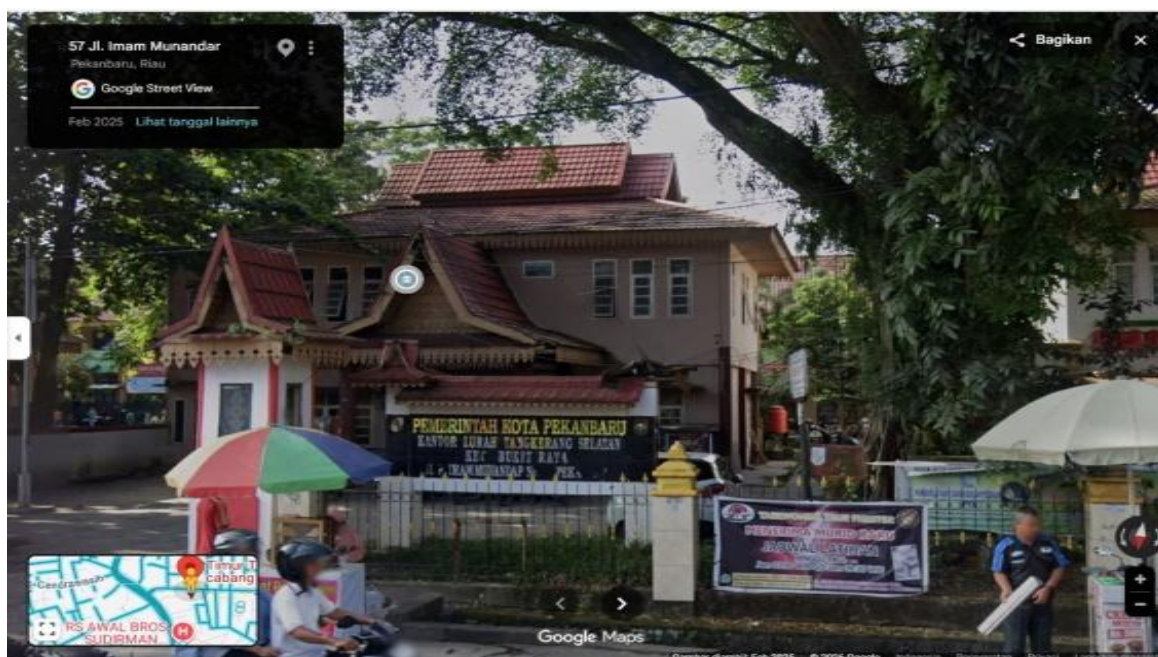


Figure 1. The Strict Official Formula



Figure 2. The Strict Official Formula

Formula 1 (the strict official formula) reflects compliance with the new nomenclature established by the local government. Local government institutions such as the Sub-district office (Kantor Lurah Tengkerang Selatan) in the corridor use the official name. This practice is not surprising because they are on the party that makes the rule, namely fellow regional agencies. Interestingly, the business actors who adopt this specific structure are dominated by newly established business entities along the

corridor. For these new businesses, adjusting to city government regulations is essential to ensure their business tax documentation runs smoothly. This straight, full adoption pattern is visually documented in Figure 1 and Figure 2.

The Legacy Naming Formula

Formula 2 (the legacy naming formula) dominates. This formula was found to be quite massive on the road. The representation of the formula can be seen in Figure 4.3 and Figure 4.4 below.



Figure 3. The Legacy Naming Formula

On the façade, Prima Bolu listed the address *Jl. Harapan Raya No. 114 Pekanbaru*. Likewise, the Andalas Motor next to it displays the text *Jl. Harapan Raya No. 108*. Both addresses are examples of physical spaces in the linguistic landscape that clash directly with the city's naming policies. Business

actors are still using the old name. The psychological and identity ties tied to the Great Hope Street are still alive in the memories of the citizens (Kostanski, 2009). This bond is manifested as a spatial anchor in the middle of the commercial space.

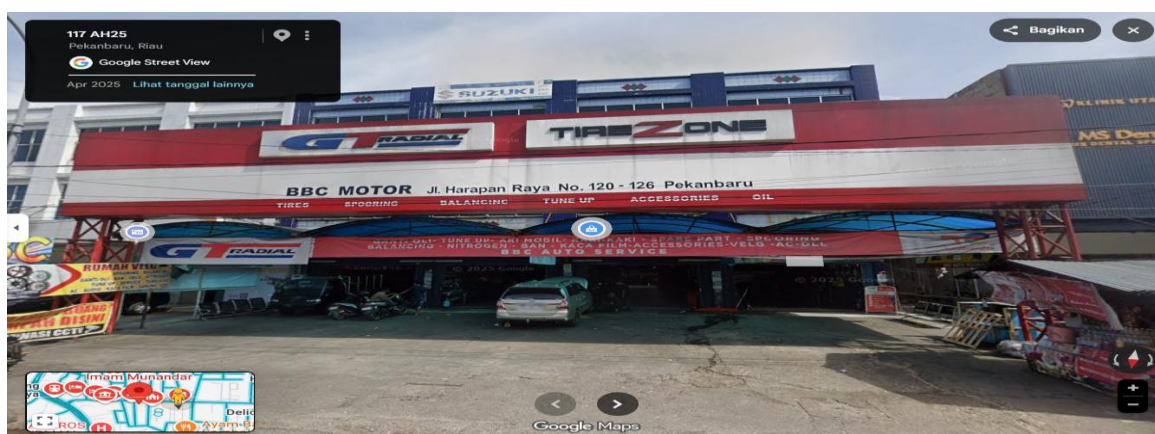


Figure 4. The Legacy Naming Formula

The use of this inheritance naming formula is not limited to the micro business sector, but also extends to the large-capital business sector. A clear example of this phenomenon can be seen in BBC Motor – GT Radial Tirezone (Figure 4), which is a leading automotive workshop that has several branches in Pekanbaru. On the front of the multi-storey shophouse building, it is clear that *BBC MOTOR Jl. Harapan Raya No. 120 - 126 Pekanbaru* is displayed on a large signboard.

Figure 4 also reveals the contest between digital and physical spaces. The difference between the two spaces is very clearly visible. From the mini map inset in the lower left corner of Google Maps, the corridor has used the official name, namely *Jalan H. Imam Munandar*. However, in the physical materiality of the building's signage (high-investment signage), the owner has chosen and installed the old name *Harapan Raya*.

BBC Motor's persistence in sticking with the old name was a pragmatic decision. They must protect

the brand equity and reputation that has been built. Their business establishment can be seen from the size of the workshop that dominates from 120 to 126. As a sizable automotive business, its operations are highly dependent on the arrival of consumer vehicles directly. Ease of access to customers' cognitive skills is much more crucial for store owners than compliance with bureaucracy. In this situation, the toponym of Harapan Raya serves as the main spatial navigation anchor for the community.

If dissected with toponymic attachment theory, this field fact confirms

the dimension of *spatial dependence* (Kostanski, 2009). The removal of *the Harapan Raya name* on store signs risks obscuring customer navigation, thus threatening the stability of turnover. This phenomenon proves that the retention of old names is not a monopoly of small businesses. Large capital owners also adopted it as an advertising strategy. As a result, economic pragmatism and the collective memory of citizens proved to be much stronger than formal urban planning regulations.

Hybrid Names



Figure 5. Hybrid Names

The case of PT Patra Jaya Humairah (Figure 4.5) shows one interesting thing, namely that one signboard is used to contain two street names at once. It is written there *JL. H.*

IMAM MUNANDAR / HARAPAN RAYA NO. 45 PEKANBARU CITY. The two names are not strictly separated, nor is one of them chosen. The two are left side by side in the same field.

Formally, the use of the name *Jalan H. Imam Munandar* is related to administrative needs. In the licensing documents, the address must follow the applicable official standards. For businesses such as Hajj and Umrah trips, this aspect should not be ignored because it is related to business legality. However, on this signage, the standard does not stand alone.

The name *of Harapan Raya* still appears, not even in a disguised position. It was as if there was some kind of other need working outside of administrative affairs. In daily practice, this name is still used quite often to refer to the location. Especially by a group of users who have known the area for a long time. On the other hand, younger users or those who are already familiar with Google Maps tend to follow the official name.

The practice is not just stating *two names for one street*. However, it is more like two different ways of reading space that are forced to meet at the same point. The signage was ultimately not entirely a state instrument, but also not entirely a colloquial language. He was somewhere in between. From there arises a kind of

small tension that continues to be left behind.

In the framework of Blommaert (2012), these conditions can be seen as *chronicles of complexity* on a small scale. One location is referred to through two naming systems that run simultaneously in a public space. This situation shows that naming does not work as a single system, but rather as an overlapping practice in everyday use.

The Legacy Name + Directional Indicator

The case of the Nusabengkel Part spare parts store fabric banner (Figure 4.6) shows how the legacy name were organically modified according to local navigation needs. On a simple flexible banner that can be temporarily installed in front of the shophouse, a large and striking address text is printed: *JL. HARAPAN RAYA UJUNG PEKANBARU*. Through this marker, street names are no longer just passive space identities, but have become daily orientation tools for residents who cross the city's final boundaries.



Figure 6. The Legacy Name + Directional Indicator

The choice to add *the Ujung* lexicon to the name of *Harapan Raya* proves the existence of a community-based navigation system in the downstream zone of the corridor. In the suburbs, informal micro-enterprises rely heavily on daily commuter traffic. As a result, an unwritten spatial agreement emerges between them. They inserted the word *Ujung* not to follow the

government's formal mapping rules, but as a tactical strategy to make their stores more easily caught by the visual cognition of motorists. The official street name (*Jalan H. Imam Munandar*) was deliberately ignored. For this fringe business ecosystem, clarity of physical position is far more valuable than administrative compliance.



Figure 7. The Legacy Name + Directional Indicator

A similar practice occurred on the address of the newly formed central

government agency, namely the National Nutrition Agency through its Nutrition

Fulfillment Service Unit (Figure 4.7), located at the peripheral zone of Jalan H. Imam Munandar. Administratively, this office sat within the Bencah Lesung area, Tenayan Raya District. Within the spatial planning system of Pekanbaru City, this location strictly belonged to the Jalan H. Imam Munandar network. However, the official signboard installed on-site explicitly displayed the address *Jalan Harapan Raya Ujung*.

This case demonstrates a notable inconsistency in street naming. Even a newly established state institution did not operate entirely within the standardized naming system mandated by the local government. Instead, the public sphere showcased a clear coexistence between administrative logic and highly situational naming practices.

A comparative analysis between the Nusa Bengkel Part banner and the Satuan Pelayanan Pemenuhan Gizi sign proves that the corridor's socio-spatial dialect has matured across different sectors. Despite their contrasting institutional backgrounds—one being a grassroots micro-enterprise and the other a vertical state apparatus—both aligned with the exact same linguistic formula. Crucially, this directional modification was never affixed to the official name to

create *Jalan H. Imam Munandar Ujung*. From a sociolinguistic perspective, the National Nutrition Agency's decision to adopt this community-driven naming structure reflects an inclusive public communication style for grassroots citizens. The state authority chose to remain flexible, deferring to local geographical memory. Had they strictly enforced the official name, the immediate directional function would have been hindered, and such spatial disorientation could ultimately obstruct public access to this essential service agency.

Virtual Linguistic Landscape and Toponymic Attachment

The linguistic landscape along Jalan H. Imam Munandar, Pekanbaru, has a unique linguistic configuration. Figure 4.8 to Figure 4.11 are the name signs of the business that stands on the road. Instead of using the current official name of the road, the sign actually uses elements of *Harapan Raya* or *Harapan*. These linguistic markers are used by various business fields, ranging from the façade of government bank buildings, health clinic signs, gadget sales outlets, to simple signs for local coffee shops on street corners.

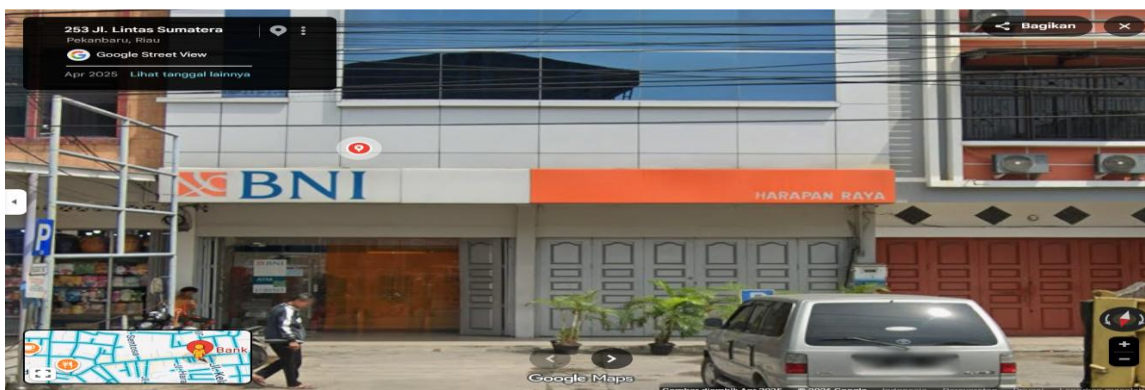


Figure 8. Virtual Linguistic Landscape and Toponymic Attachment



Figure 8. Virtual Linguistic Landscape and Toponymic Attachment

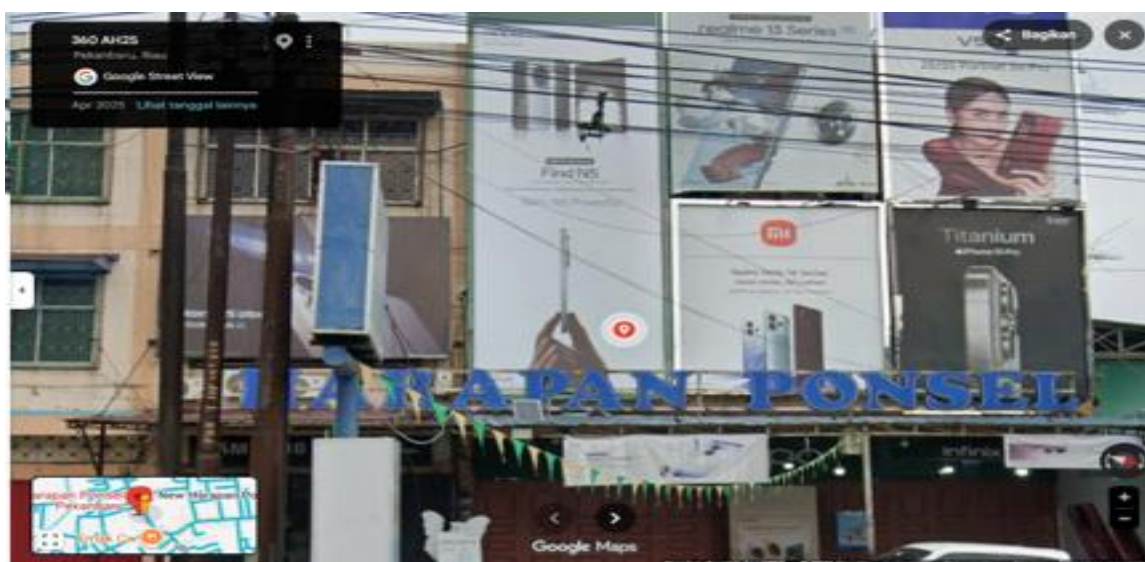


Figure 9. Virtual Linguistic Landscape and Toponymic Attachment

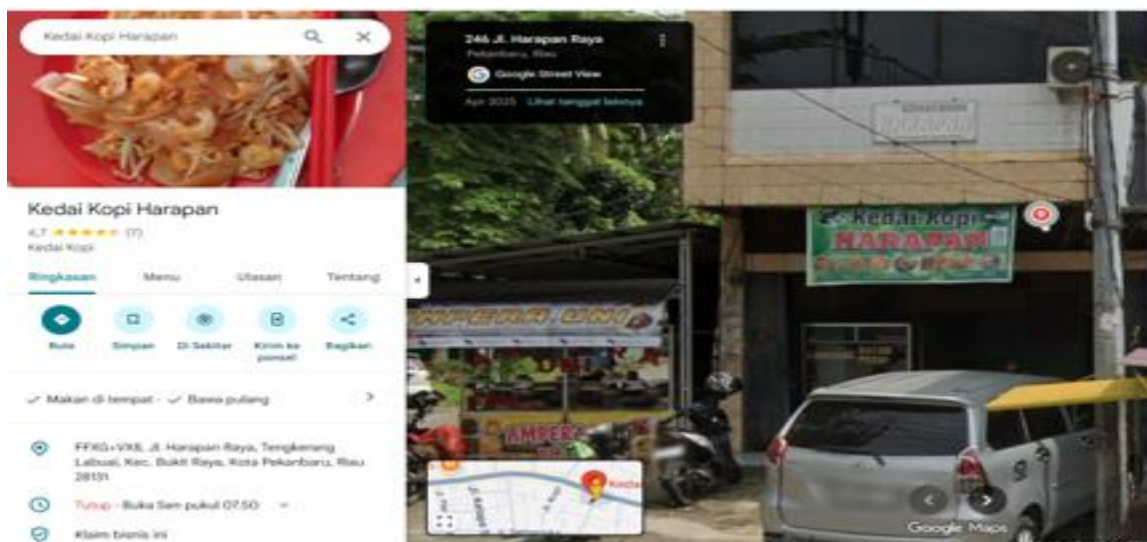


Figure 10. Virtual Linguistic Landscape and Toponymic Attachment

The use of this old name element is deliberately carried out in the naming of business entities (*brand naming*). State financial institutions display the names of BNI Harapan Raya and BTN Harapan Raya on the front gate of their branch offices.

Similar practices are also being adopted by the private retail sector, as seen on the billboards of the giant Harapan Mobil store that are juxtaposed with the logos of multinational technology manufacturers. The community service sector also adopts the same pattern, for example, Harapan Medika Clinic and Harapan Bunda Main Clinic. Even small business units such as Kedai Kopi Harapan embed the word as an identity. The tendency of business

actors to absorb elements of *the Jalan Harapan Raya* name into their brand identity shows the occurrence of *toponymic commodification*. The old street name switches functions. It is no longer just a geographical space, but a commercial asset with economic value to bind local consumers.

For the people of Pekanbaru who cross this route on a daily basis, the old name is already attached in their memory. In daily interactions, such as conversations, online transportation bookings, logistics courier activities in finding the delivery address of goods; The name *Jalan Harapan Raya* is much more dominant than the name *Jalan H. Imam Munandar*. The old name has been attached as part of the daily geography of

residents. The change in street names by the government does not necessarily change the habits in the field. Locals continue to rely on the legacy toponym.

The choice to continue with the old name indicates economic and psychological considerations. The decision to ignore the new street name was not due to ignorance, but rather a form of strategy to maintain the equity of the established space. For banking or retail, changing the name of a branch means risking the visibility of the business on digital search engines. The commercial sector utilizes the collective memory of the community as a spatial adaptation strategy. By using the old name, their institution or store remains easy to find. Consumers also feel more comfortable because the old name is familiar to them. When remembering a store, for example, consumers immediately remember the location, which is in the old name.

If drawn into the academic realm, the phenomenon is a representation of the process of commodification of language in the public sphere. The local linguistic element has undergone a shift in function from a mere *geographical marker* to a high-value economic commodity (*linguistic commodity*). This phenomenon

proves the work of *the toponymic attachment* theory (Kostanski, 2009). Through the dimension of identity and toponymic dependence, business actors exploit people's emotional attachment to past names to gain financial benefits (Vuolteenaho & Berg, 2009). Old place names are deliberately treated and reproduced as spatial memory anchors (Gorter, 2006). This proves that oral history in the minds of the public has a much stronger durability than the formal regulation sheet of urban planning.

Pedagogical Implications: VLL as Authentic TEFL Resources

The results of this research in the form of syntactic formulas and toponyms in Pekanbaru have practical functions outside the sociolinguistic realm, namely *authentic materials* in TEFL in Indonesia. So far, English classes have been stuck in conventional textbooks that are too Western. College students have a hard time seeing the relevance of English in their daily lives. By utilizing the virtual linguistic landscape (VLL) of this study, lecturers can apply a *place-based pedagogy* approach. The four syntactic formulas found on commercial branding boards (see Table 1) can be adopted directly as a mini-corpus for *English for*

Specific Purposes (ESP) courses, particularly in *branding*, advertising, and business communication materials.

The results of the research in the form of the phenomenon of *address hybrids* and toponymic resistance can be a discussion starter to build *Critical Language Awareness* (CLA) for students. In the Sociolinguistics or Discourse Analysis class, students are no longer just memorizing grammar, but are invited to dissect why local business people prefer

the combination of English-Indonesian language rather than the official name of the government's street. This analysis process trains students' pragmatic understanding and multimodal literacy. They learned to see that language in public spaces is not just a marker of location, but a tool for negotiating economic identity. This practical step changes the role of students from mere language consumers to critical observers of language phenomena around them.

CONCLUSIONS

This research shows that the linguistic landscape (LL) on Jalan H. Imam Munandar (previously named Jalan Harapan Raya) is a space for contestation. There the *top-down* language policy clashes with pragmatic and cultural needs from the bottom up. Structural analysis of commercial signs along this 8.5 km corridor resulted in four naming formulas, namely new, old (legacy), hybrid, and old plus directional addresses. Beyond this physical configuration, this study succeeded in uncovering the profound sociolinguistic phenomenon due to the existence of strong *toponymic attachments*. Local business owners don't just use old toponyms as passive geographical indicators. They actively

commodify it by integrating the name *Harapan Raya* or *Harapan* into their *brand name*. This deliberate adoption serves as a tool of linguistic resistance to maintain community trust, market visibility, and digital readability on virtual mapping platforms even though the government has changed the official street names.

From an applied linguistics perspective, these findings make significant practical contributions as innovative *TEFL pedagogical resources*. The coexistence between the official and old naming systems provides a local and authentic corpus for EFL classes, while shifting the teaching paradigm away from continuing to rely on textbooks centered

on Western culture. This linguistic practice can be incorporated into courses such as *English for Specific Purposes* (ESP) and *Discourse Analysis*. In addition, the language practice can foster *Critical Language Awareness* (CLA) and multimodal literacy of EFL students. Students are triggered to look beyond the vocabulary on the surface. They can critically unravel how language choices, toponyms, and digital spaces intersect with local economic identities. Ultimately, this study concludes that physical and virtual linguistic landscapes are not just static location markers, but dynamic ideological spaces. Future research is suggested to test the application of this *place-based framework* in the classroom empirically to evaluate its direct impact on the communication and critical thinking competencies of EFL students.

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