

REPRESENTATION OF POLITICAL IDENTITY ON CAMPAIGN BILLBOARDS IN KUPANG CITY: LINGUISTIC LANDSCAPE STUDY

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Abstract. This study explores the political identity representation in the campaign billboard of the governor of NTT and the Mayor of Kupang candidates for the 2024-2029 period in Kupang City through the lens of linguistic landscape analysis. The research addresses three key aspects: the language employed in candidate billboards to shape political identity, the linguistic elements that reflect the candidates' ideologies and political values, and the incorporation of local culture and languages to establish connections with the voters. Data was obtained using observation and documentation methods. Using qualitative analysis, this research reveals that the language and visual components of the billboards play a pivotal role in constructing the candidates' public personas, aligning political ideologies with the cultural and linguistic diversity of the region. The findings highlight the strategic use of local languages and cultural symbols, illustrating how these elements build rapport with voters and foster a sense of shared identity within the community.

Keywords: *Politic, identity, billboard, campaign, linguistic landscape.*

INTRODUCTION

In the dynamic and multifaceted realm of political communication, campaign billboards are vital for shaping public perception and constructing political identity (Baker, 2009; Hirsch et al., 2024). As visual and linguistic artifacts that occupy public spaces, these billboards do more than promote the candidates. They reflect broader ideological underpinnings and values aimed at resonating with the electorate (Benu et al., 2024). In the context of Kupang City, where cultural and linguistic diversity is rich, using language in political billboards becomes a crucial aspect of political strategy.

This research examines the campaign billboard of candidates running for Governor on NTT and Mayor of Kupang for the 2024-2029 period. Studying political identity in public spaces has garnered significant attention in sociolinguistics and linguistic landscape research. The use of language on billboards and other political campaigns reflects broader societal and cultural dynamics, as well as the political ideologies of the candidates (Stier et al., 2018; Riedl et al., 2023). Drawing from the theoretical framework of linguistic landscape analysis, it investigates how language is employed to construct political identity, how ideological values are reflected in the linguistic elements, and the extent to which local languages and cultural symbols are incorporated to build connections with the public (Gorter & Cenoz, 2024).

The linguistic landscape of Kupang offers a unique vantage point for understanding the intersection of politics, language, and culture. As a city that blends traditional and modern elements, political billboards in Kupang often use Indonesian, regional languages, and symbolic imagery to communicate campaign messages (Benu et al., 2024). This combination provides a rich site for analyzing how political identities are constructed and conveyed to different demographic groups.

Linguistic landscape theory provides a framework for understanding how languages are used in public spaces to communicate social, political, and cultural messages (Beeh et al., 2022; Nenotek et al., 2025). The concept was first introduced by Landry and Bourhis (1997), who defined the linguistic landscape as the visibility and salience of languages on public and commercial signs in a given territory. This framework allows researchers to analyze the symbolic and communicative functions of language in public spaces, with a focus on how language choices reflect power relations and social hierarchies (Sudarmanto et al., 2023). In the context of political billboards, the linguistic landscape serves as a platform for candidates to engage with voters through carefully curated linguistic and visual elements. Studies by Gorter (2006) and Shohamy (2006) emphasize that the language on billboards is informative and a tool for identity construction, particularly in multilingual settings. In regions like Kupang, where local languages and Indonesian coexist, linguistic choices on political billboards become a significant marker of how candidates position themselves concerning different linguistic communities.

Political discourse analysis has extensively explored the relationship between language and political identity. Language plays a pivotal role in shaping political identities by conveying ideologies, values, and affiliations (Dunmire, 2012). In campaign settings, political candidates use language to project their identity, align with voters' concerns, and differentiate themselves from opponents (Majid & Amirulkamar, 2023; Sihombing et al., 2024). The language used in campaign billboards, whether formal or colloquial, inclusive or exclusive, helps to establish a rapport with voters and conveys a candidate's values and policy stances (Tshuma, 2021). Previous studies revealed that political identity is constructed not only through the content of messages but also through their linguistic form (Hoerudin, 2024; Benu et al., 2024). Candidates may use persuasive rhetoric, metaphors, and specific linguistic registers to appeal to their target audience. Similarly, the linguistic landscape of political advertisements can serve to align candidates with national, regional, or local identities, depending on the strategic use of language and imagery (Farhan et al., 2024).

In multilingual societies, the incorporation of local languages and cultural symbols into political campaigns is crucial for building connections with the electorate (Bonotti & Willoughby, 2023). The strategic use of language in public spaces, particularly in political campaigns, can signal inclusivity and solidarity with specific linguistic communities (Naeem et al., 2022). This is particularly relevant in contexts like Kupang City, where regional languages and cultural diversity play an important role in the social fabric.

Recent studies in political advertising have shown that candidates who use local languages and cultural references in their campaigns tend to foster stronger ties with voters. For instance, in regions with strong cultural identities, using local symbols, traditional imagery, and indigenous languages in campaign materials can reinforce a candidate's authenticity and local relevance (Ricks, 2020; Ibrahim & Olorin, 2020). In Indonesia, political candidates have increasingly incorporated

regional languages and cultural markers to connect with voters, especially in areas with distinct local identities (Benu et al., 2024; Majid & Amirulkamar, 2023). The strategic use of local languages in political billboards to cultivate a sense of belonging and regional pride (Malabar, 2020); (Benu, 2021). This strategy not only appeals to local voters but also helps candidates present themselves as representatives of the cultural and linguistic heritage of the region. The integration of cultural elements, such as traditional motifs or regional idioms, can evoke a sense of shared identity, making candidates more relatable to the electorate. Studying political identity in public spaces has garnered significant attention in sociolinguistics and linguistic landscape research. The use of language on billboards and other forms of political campaign reflects broader societal and cultural dynamics, as well as the political ideologies of the candidates.

The study addresses three primary research questions 1). How is the language used in billboard advertisements of regional head candidates to shape political identity? 2). How do the linguistic elements reflect the candidates' political ideologies and values? 3). To what extent do these billboards utilize local culture and regional languages to foster a connection with the people of Kupang? By answering these questions, this research aims to shed light on the strategic use of language in political communication, demonstrating how campaign billboards act as a platform for engaging with the cultural identity of Kupang's electorate. Through this analysis, the study contributes to the broader discourse on the role of linguistic landscapes in political campaigns and their impact on shaping political consciousness within localized contexts.

This study expands the scope of linguistic landscape studies by applying it to a political context in Kupang, an area characterized by linguistic and cultural diversity. While much of the existing literature on linguistic landscapes focuses on commercial or everyday signage, this study sheds light on how political actors strategically use language and semiotic elements to construct political identities and communicate with the electorate. The findings provide insights into how political billboards function as more than just campaign tools but as reflections of social, linguistic, and cultural dynamics in a multilingual region.

By examining the language and imagery on political billboards, this study contributes to political discourse analysis, particularly in identity construction. It highlights how political candidates craft their public personas through language choices, slogans, and cultural references. This research underscores the role of language in shaping political identity, aligning candidates with specific ideologies, and fostering connections with local voters. It offers a nuanced understanding of political communication in a regional election, contributing to broader political representation and rhetoric discussions.

This study also provides a unique perspective on leveraging local culture and linguistic practices in political campaigns. In regions like Kupang, where a rich tapestry of languages and cultural traditions, including local languages and symbols in political campaigns, plays a key role in shaping voter engagement. By examining how these elements are utilized in political billboards, the study reveals the importance of cultural identity in political discourse, particularly in fostering connections between candidates and diverse linguistic communities. This understanding can benefit political strategists, sociolinguists, and anthropologists interested in the intersections of language, culture, and politics.

For political practitioners, this study offers practical insights into the effectiveness of language use and cultural symbolism in campaign strategies. By analyzing the use of local languages and cultural imagery, the findings can inform future political campaigns to better connect with voters in multilingual and culturally diverse regions. The study highlights the importance of linguistic inclusivity and cultural sensitivity in political messaging, providing candidates and campaign teams with a better understanding of how to tailor their communications to resonate with local electorates.

The findings of this study are not limited to the regional elections in Kupang but have broader implications for regional and national elections in Indonesia and other multilingual contexts. As Indonesia is a linguistically diverse country, the strategic use of language in political campaigns is a critical area of study. This research offers valuable insights that can be applied to elections in other regions of Indonesia where similar linguistic and cultural dynamics are at play. The study's focus on regional languages and identity formation provides a framework that can be adapted to understand political communication in various regional and national electoral contexts.

METHOD

This study employs a qualitative research design, combining linguistic landscape analysis with political discourse analysis to explore the representation of political identity in campaign billboards of governor and mayor election campaigns in Kupang City for the 2024-2029 period. The research method is structured around four key components: research design, data resources, data collection methods, and data analysis.

Research Design

The study adopts a descriptive qualitative design to understand how language and visual elements are used in political billboards to shape political identity and connect with local culture. A linguistic landscape approach analyses public signage in its sociolinguistic and political context, focusing on the interplay between language, visual imagery, and cultural references in shaping voter perceptions (Ben-Rafael, 2009).

Data Resources

The primary data in this study consists of campaign billboards for the governor of NTT and Mayor of Kupang candidates for 2024-2029 period displayed across Kupang City. The data was collected in September 2024. These billboards are the main data resource because they are critical in disseminating political messages and shaping public perception in a multilingual, multicultural society.

Method and Technique of Data Collection

The data collection process is divided into three key steps:

- a. **Visual Documentation (Photographs):** The primary method of data collection involves photographing billboards displayed in public spaces throughout Kupang City. A total of 48 billboards were selected, representing various political candidates and locations. The selection was based on the billboard's visibility, the prominence of linguistic and visual elements, and local cultural symbols.

Photographs were taken from various parts of the city, including densely populated urban areas, main roads, and rural outskirts, to capture the diverse representation of political messaging across different communities.

- b. **Field Observations:** Field observations were conducted to document the sociocultural context of the neighborhood these billboards were located. These observations helped to provide additional insights into how the public interacts with and interprets the billboards. The placement of the billboards concerning local cultural landmarks, community centers, and marketplaces was also noted to understand the candidates' strategies in targeting specific voter groups.

Data Analysis

The data were analyzed using linguistic landscape, sociocultural, and thematic analysis. The linguistic analysis involved examining the language choices made by political candidates, such as the use of Indonesian, local languages, or a combination of both. This analysis focused on identifying code-switching patterns, rhetorical strategies, and the use of persuasive language. Additionally, the study explored how language was used to express political ideologies, such as through campaign slogans, values, or ideological positioning. The analysis also considered the sociocultural context in which the campaign billboards were placed. This included examining how the billboards' language and symbols resonated with local cultural values and how the local community perceived them. The study analyzed the role of local languages in building cultural connections between candidates and voters, assessing the extent to which local identity was leveraged in political messaging. Finally, the campaign billboards were categorized based on their thematic content, such as using specific political themes and how these themes aligned with linguistic and visual strategies. The thematic analysis helped identifying overarching patterns in political identity and ideologies communicated through language and imagery.

The findings from these analyses were then synthesized to provide insights into the broader role of language and visual symbols in political communication, particularly in the context of Kupang's multilingual and multicultural society.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Findings

This section presents the key findings from the linguistic and sociocultural analysis of the political campaign on billboard signs for Governor and Mayor candidates in Kupang City for the 2024-2029 period. The findings are discussed concerning the study's research questions, focusing on how language, visual elements, and cultural symbols are used to construct political identity, reflect ideologies, and build connections with the local community.

Language Use in Political Billboards for Identity Construction

The first research question addressed how language is used in the billboards of governor and mayor candidates to construct political identity. The analysis revealed that language plays a significant role in establishing a candidate's identity, aligning them with local values, and presenting them as approachable and relatable to the voters.

a. Use of Indonesian and Local Languages

The billboards primarily use Bahasa Indonesia, indicating that the candidates aim for a broad, national or urban voter base rather than focusing solely on ethnic or cultural identity. The dominant use of Bahasa Indonesian, the national language, to communicate key political messages as it ensures broader comprehensibility across various demographic groups. However, many candidates also incorporated Kupang Malay, particularly in slogans and catchphrases. This strategic code-switching allowed candidates to demonstrate a connection with the local culture, positioning themselves as "one of the people." For instance, the phrase *Menuju NTT Maju & Mandiri* "Towards a prosperous and independent NTT" was commonly used in Indonesian to foster unity. The use of Bahasa Indonesia as the dominant language reflects the candidates' desire to connect with a broader audience in Kupang, suggesting a more formal and national approach to governance rather than emphasizing regional or ethnic identities.



Figure 1-2. Sample of the use of Bahasa Indonesia and Kupang Malay on the campaign billboards

The findings revealed the common use of acronyms in political campaigns. It is a communication strategy to create a strong and memorable brand for voters. This phenomenon can be found in various regions, including political campaign billboards for local government candidates. For example, *Siaga*, *Asik*, and *Bersinar*, are the acronym of the candidates and the political slogans. The acronyms are typically combinations of the names of both candidates (the candidate for head and deputy head of the region), intended to create a simple, appealing, and memorable impression for voters.

b. Rhetorical Strategies and Persuasive Language:

Candidates employed various rhetorical strategies, including inclusive language, first-person plural pronouns, and value-laden phrases to foster a sense of shared purpose. The slogan *Kami Siap Melayani, Bukan Dilayani* “We are ready to serve, not to be served” reflects a humble, service-oriented approach to leadership. It constructs an identity of servant leadership, which appeals to voters looking for leaders who prioritize the public's needs over personal gains. The use of *Kami* “we” rather than *Saya* “I” builds a collective identity, implying that the candidates work as a team or in cooperation with the community.

Political slogans were often framed to emphasize collective action and future progress. This form of discourse positioned the candidates as leaders working alongside the community, reinforcing their political identity as inclusive and people-oriented. The use of the hashtag *manyala kaka* “lit up bro” is a strategy to persuade people. This is a direct use of regional language from the NTT area, employing informal, familial terms that resonate deeply with the local culture. Using the term “kaka”, the candidates position themselves as part of the community, creating a sense of familiarity and trust. This taps into the cultural respect for kinship and community bonds common in East Nusa Tenggara.

Linguistic Elements Reflecting Political Ideologies and Values

The second research question focused on how the billboards' linguistic elements reflect the candidates' political ideologies and values. The study found that candidates used specific linguistic markers to align themselves with ideological values such as progress, unity, tradition, and social justice.

a. Ideological Themes

The most common themes identified in the campaign billboards included development, social welfare, and unity. Slogans such as *Menuju NTT Maju & Mandiri* “Towards a prosperous and independent NTT”, reflect the candidates' ideology of economic progress and self-reliance. The words *maju* (prosperous) and “mandiri” (independent) suggest that the candidates envision a future where NTT becomes more developed and self-sufficient, aligning with modernization and regional empowerment ideals. The promise to ensure water availability in the slogan *sumber air su ada* “the water source already exists” reflects a commitment to address basic infrastructure needs. Access to water is a major issue in many parts of NTT, and the focus on this crucial resource reflects a pragmatic political ideology, prioritizing improving living conditions and addressing critical infrastructure challenges. Another slogan, such as *Sejahtera untuk Semua* “welfare for all”, directly focuses on social welfare and economic prosperity, a common political ideology aimed at addressing inequality and improving the quality of life for all citizens. This reflects a centrist or social democratic political stance, focusing on economic growth, social inclusion, and equality. These ideologically charged phrases were often accompanied by symbols of modernization (e.g., infrastructure images) to convey a forward-looking agenda.

b. Symbolism of Unity and Inclusion:

Linguistically, the emphasis on unity was paramount in most campaign materials, with phrases like *Bersama, Semua, and Kita* recurring across billboards. These linguistic choices reflected an ideology of inclusivity, portraying the candidates as champions of societal cohesion. The use of “Sahabat” in the slogan also demonstrates the value of community, solidarity, and unity. The candidates

portray themselves as partners of the people, emphasizing cooperation and mutual benefit. This could indicate an ideology that values grassroots participation and closeness to the community. This was further reinforced by the text's visual elements, such as images of candidates interacting with diverse groups representing various ethnic and social backgrounds.

Incorporation of Local Culture and Local Languages in Building Connections with Voters

The third research question examined how the billboards utilized local culture and regional languages to foster connections with the people of Kupang City. The study revealed that billboards do not heavily rely on traditional clothing or ethnic symbols in their visual presentation, which could have further emphasized cultural identity. However, this absence suggests that the candidates focus on a more inclusive and universal message, attempting to appeal to a wide demographic that may extend beyond any ethnic or cultural group in NTT.

The inclusion of regional languages in political slogans and key messages was a powerful strategy to connect with voters on a personal level. Candidates who incorporated the local language in their messaging were often perceived as more relatable and committed to preserving local cultural values. For example, using Kupang Malay phrases appealed to voters in rural communities where these languages are commonly spoken, making the candidates appear more culturally embedded and attuned to the needs of the local population. Kupang Malay phrases like *bae sonde bae*, *siaga lebe ba* “for better or worse Siaga is better” were embedded to appeal directly to indigenous voters.

Kupang Malay emphasized cultural solidarity and signaled the candidates' respect for regional linguistic identity, enhancing their authenticity and credibility. This also reflects a populist communication style, which positions the candidates as relatable, down-to-earth, and connected to the local community. This colloquial language aims to simplify the message for the general public and assert the superiority of their candidacy.

Another example is the use of the hashtag *Manyala Kaka*. The use of *manyala* “lit up” combined with *Kaka*, a term of address in local NTT languages meaning elder brother creates a powerful local connection. It is informal, affectionate, and taps into regional cultural identity, portraying the candidates as close to the people, particularly using local terms of endearment. This slogan builds an image of energized, community-oriented leadership, likely aimed at younger local voters.

Discussion

The findings of this study illustrate the complex interplay between language, politics, and culture in Kupang City's public sphere. Language choice on political billboards serves the functional purpose of communication and acts as a tool for identity construction, allowing candidates to position themselves ideologically and culturally (Gakahu, 2024); (Mangad et al., 2024). By blending Indonesian and local languages, candidates could project themselves as progressive leaders and guardians of local traditions (Benu et al., 2024).

The language used in political billboards plays a crucial role in shaping a candidate's identity and influencing voter perceptions. Candidates aim to create a

memorable and relatable identity that aligns with voters' values and aspirations through strategic name representation, emotionally resonant slogans, and cultural references. Political billboards also reflect broader ideological narratives and demonstrate how language can be a powerful tool for persuasion, connection, and identity construction in the political arena. Incorporating local culture and language further strengthens a candidate's image as deeply rooted in the community, while slogans and acronyms create a simplified and memorable brand that resonates with voters. By using language to project-specific values, aspirations, and affiliations, political candidates shape their public personas and influence the electoral process.

Using acronyms in political billboard advertisements is an effective communication strategy for building a strong and memorable brand. Acronyms serve not only to make the candidates' names easier to recognize but also to foster affection and emotional connections with voters through the use of positive and familiar words (Faisal, 2019). However, campaign teams must ensure that the acronyms accurately represent the candidates' vision, mission, and values to avoid oversimplifying the message or creating misunderstandings among voters.

Furthermore, the study confirms that political billboards serve as more than just advertising tools—they are sites of ideological negotiation where candidates use language and semiotics to craft their political personas and forge connections with voters. The findings underscore the necessity for future political candidates and campaigners to pay close attention to the sociolinguistic landscape of the regions they aim to serve, ensuring their messaging resonates with national ideals and local identities.

The linguistic elements used in political billboards serve as powerful tools for reflecting and communicating candidates' political ideologies and values (Farhan et al., 2024). Action-oriented verbs highlight progress and reform, while inclusive language emphasizes unity and equality. Conservative candidates may prioritize stability, tradition, and continuity, using language that appeals to voters who value social and cultural preservation. In regions with strong local identities, candidates use culturally resonant language to connect with voters' sense of pride in their heritage. Ultimately, these linguistic choices help shape candidates' public identities, making them more appealing to specific voter groups and ensuring that their messages align with the political ideologies that resonate most with their constituents (Hall, 1997).

Incorporating local culture and regional languages into political billboards is an effective strategy for building strong connections with voters (Fahnestock & Harris, 2023). By using local dialects, cultural symbols, and regional issues, candidates demonstrate that they understand and respect the community they wish to serve. This helps create a sense of familiarity, kinship, and shared identity, all of which are crucial for winning the trust and support of local voters. Through this strategy, political candidates can position themselves not just as national figures but as local champions, deeply embedded in the fabric of the community and committed to advancing its unique needs and aspirations.

CONCLUSION

The campaign billboards utilize formal, professional language to construct the candidates' identity as capable, service-oriented leaders focusing on clean, innovative, and prosperous governance. The linguistic elements reflect ideologies aligned with progressive politics, anti-corruption, and modernization. While there is

little explicit reference to local culture through language or symbols, the campaign attempts to connect with voters through a shared vision for the development of Kupang City, projecting the candidates as modern leaders ready to lead the city toward a better future. The absence of regional languages suggests a desire for a broader, more inclusive appeal across diverse voter groups.

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