

## A Linguistic Landscape Study in Kya Kya Surabaya, Indonesia

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### ABSTRACT

*Kya Kya, known as Kembang Jepun, has transitioned from a predominantly Chinese cultural hub to a diverse economic and social space reflecting Indonesia's multicultural identity. Using data collected from 130 signs across the district, combined with interview, this research examines language usage categorized as monolingual, bilingual, and multilingual, shedding light on the motives behind language selection. As a result, Indonesian emerges as the dominant language across all categories, reflecting its role as the national language. However, other languages such as Chinese, English, Dutch, and Javanese contribute to the district's linguistic diversity. Bilingual signage highlights the coexistence of globalization and the enduring presence of the Chinese community, while multilingual signs underline the area's multicultural identity. This study demonstrates how language in public spaces reflects Kya Kya's evolving identity, shaped by historical legacies, cultural interactions, and social transformations. The findings provide valuable insights into the linguistic landscape of Surabaya and its relevance to broader discussions on language, culture, and urban identity in Indonesia.*

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### KEYWORDS

Sociolinguistics; Linguistic Landscape; Surabaya; Kya Kya, Kembang Jepun.

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### 1. Introduction

Kya Kya or is well known as Kembang Jepun, is one of Surabaya's economic center. The diverse ethnics are residing in this area, specifically Chinese. According to Badan Perencanaan Pembangunan Kota Surabaya, Kya Kya is the area where many Chinese people become traders and it is surrounded with the nuances of Chinese architecture. However, there was a gradual decline of the cultural heritage mainly on the presence of Chinese buildings, fading cultural traditions, or a shift in residential location (Wulandari, 2017; Said et al., 2021; Yaumi et al., 2024; Youngsun et al., 2024). As a result, the identity of Kya Kya was not only covered with Chinese culture. Kya Kya's identity has developed, transcending its initial focus on Chinese culture.

Language serves as one of the unique identities in Kembang Jepun. Furthermore, there is a way to delve deeper into the Kya Kya area related to the language used, namely the linguistic landscape. Florian Coulmas (2008) defines linguistic landscape as the study of written language displayed in public places. Linguistic landscape covers the signage of an area, including shop names, street signs, governmental signs, and other signage which offers insights into the sociolinguistic aspect of the area. According to Coulmas (2008), linguistic landscape goes beyond language displayed, moreover, it shows the relationship between language and the social factors involved, such as ethnics, religion, communities, or economic activity.

By examining signs as the focus of this study, it provides the significance of the study. According to Spolsky (2008), the significance of studying public signage is to understand a sociolinguistic ecology in a certain area. Over years, linguistic landscape analysis in signs has proven to be a powerful tool to explore the multilingual characteristics of a place. Regarding this, Cenoz & Gorter (2009) points out that the languages used in signage, mainly in bilingual and multilingual settings, could hold significant symbolic meaning. Understanding language used in Kya Kya offers valuable benefits, for instance, it could provide insights into the evolving identity and the social dynamics which can be beneficial for policymakers, communities, and other who interested in understanding the linguistic landscape of Kembang Jepun. As a result, this study aims to explore the diverse languages used in Kembang Jepun street and classify them into three types, such as monolingual, bilingual, or multilingual. Furthermore, the motivation behind language choice is described, connecting the factors such as cultural heritage, historical influences, social dynamics, and the impact of globalization (Sugiyarti et al., 2020; Wicaksono et al., 2021; Abbas et al., 2024; Ko et al., 2025).

The concept of a linguistic landscape is defined by Landry and Bourhis (1997, p. 25) as the world of written language displayed in public spaces from street names, shop signs, billboards, or even government signage. Linguistic landscapes shed light on the language used in a particular area. Not only identifying the language, linguistic landscape delves on the deeper exploration as proposed by Backhaus (2007) within three questions; (1) "Linguistic Landscaping by Whom?", focuses on the originators of the sign as the official and non-official signage; (2) "Linguistic Landscaping for Whom?", displays the focus to the audience or the intended recipients of the signs; and (3) "Linguistic Landscape Quo Vadis?", interprets the historical perspective into the chosen area's cultural and demographic changes.

Based on the theories provided by Backhaus (2007), these questions give a foundation to explore the language used involving the originators, the audience, and the historical context which will be implied for this study. According to the proposed theories, by analyzing the originators of the sign, this study delves into the role of different stakeholders in shaping the linguistic landscape in Kya Kya. For instance, the role of governmental regulations regarding the use of language. Moreover, by understanding the target audience, this study could interpret the language choices on signs and the reason behind it. Lastly, by examining the changes of sign, this study offers valuable insight to understand how the linguistic landscape in Kya Kya has evolved as in monolingual, bilingual, and multilingual.

Several similar studies regarding the Linguistic Landscape of Chinese communities or districts have been conducted. Within the same object as the present study, Safitri (2020) conducted a research on three Chinatowns of Surabaya namely Kembang Jepun, Tambak Bayan, and Kapasan Dalam. By utilizing Landry and Bourhis theory of Linguistic Landscape, Safitri (2020) reveals that Indonesian reigned as the most used language and interestingly the readers in Kembang Jepun embraced English and Chinese signage. Moreover, in Singapore's Chinatown, the linguistic landscape differs between daytime (diurnal) and nighttime (nocturnal). Zhang, Seilhamer, & Cheung (2021) reveal that in diurnal, the linguistic landscape is more multilingual. However, in nocturnal settings, English becomes more prominent (monolingual) to target international audiences at night. Next, Wu & Techasan (2016) also uses Linguistic Landscape to dive into the shop names of Bangkok's Chinatown. This study shows that the shop owners in Bangkok's Chinatown are using elements and traditional characters for their businesses although the spoken Chinese is slowly fading among generations.

Additionally, Sunan Ampel which serves as the closest place near Kya Kya has been analyzed by Laela (2021) and Nuswantara et. al. (2021). Laela (2021) conducted a linguistic landscape study in tourism places of Surabaya including Sunan Ampel, whereas Rohmah et. al. (2021) focusing on the multilingualism found in Sunan Ampel. Those studies reveal that Sunal Ampel ties to Kembang Jepun which suggest that languages found in Sunan Ampel might also be present in Kembang Jepun. To conclude, aforementioned studies have explored linguistic landscape in specific regions. Nonetheless, an in-depth analysis of the specific linguistic landscape district within the Kembang Jepun is yet to be conducted. As a result, this study delves deeper to the Kya Kya in Jl. Kembang Jepun which explores the language choice as in target readers, historical and cultural influences, and government regulations.

## **2. Methodology**

This study employs a descriptive qualitative approach, allowing the researcher to delve deeper into the linguistic landscape focusing on a single specific geographic area. The research site is situated in Kya Kya Jl. Kembang Jepun, Bongkaran, Bongkaran subdistrict, Surabaya, East Java Province, Indonesia. According to Badan Perencanaan Pembangunan Kota Surabaya, Kembang Jepun is famous as the business district in Surabaya. This offers a variety of written language reflecting in the signs presented in the district.

Kya Kya is one of the "Chinatown" districts in Surabaya. Since the focus of this research is to conduct a linguistic landscape study in Kya Kya Jl. Kembang Jepun, therefore, this study utilizes purposive sampling. According to Rose et. al. (2020), purposive sampling targets specific sampling to provide wider information on a certain conducted phenomenon. The researcher selects signs that are accessible within Kya Kya district, including shop names, bank signs, governmental notices, and others. Additionally, the researcher includes a participant as the key informant from "Hwie Tiau Ka Community" as one of the Chinese communities in Chinatown to gain linguistic landscape insights within Kya Kya.

Moreover, the primary data source is the signage collected within Kya Kya, as well as interview results to support the findings which are considered as the secondary data for this research. In order to enhance the validity and reliability of the findings, this study employs multiple techniques of data collection as triangulation. The researcher employed observation as the main technique for data collection and captured the signs located in Kya Kya using a digital camera or smartphone. A total of 130 samples were taken during observation. Also, the researcher utilizes semi-structured interviews to gather the social context on the language shown in Kya Kya. By combining observation and interview, it could reveal a

richer picture of the language used in Kya Kya. Similarly, Barni & Bagna (2008) argues that triangulated data in linguistic landscape allows the researcher to uncover the nuanced information of language contact within the district.

This study leverages the linguistic landscape analytical framework proposed by Backhaus (2007). To achieve the understanding of language distribution, the compiled signs were categorized as monolingual, bilingual, and multilingual. Furthermore, the researcher calculated the percentage from the representation of each group language and mapping its distribution. Beyond that, this study also investigates the reason behind the language choices on the signage. This exploration provides context that reveals the factors such as the readers of the sign, cultural influence, legal regulations, or other possible factors. In the end, the findings are in the form of narrative with the incorporation of tables and figures of charts and photos.

### 3. Result and Discussion

This section provides information regarding language displayed *Kya Kya* Surabaya and the reasons behind the choice of languages in *Kya Kya Surabaya*. The distribution of the language displayed is presented below in Table 1.

Table 1. Language Displayed Distribution in *Kya Kya*

<b>GROUPS</b>	<b>LANGUAGES</b>	<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>PERCENTAGE</b>
<i>Monolingual</i>	Indonesian	55	42,3%
	English	4	3%
	Dutch	2	1,5%
	Chinese	1	0,7%
	<b>Sub-total</b>	62	47,6%
<i>Bilingual</i>	Indonesian-English	19	14,6%
	Indonesian-Chinese	17	13%
	Indonesian-Dutch	7	5,3%
	Indonesian-Javanese	5	3,8%
	Indonesian-Arabic	2	1,5%
	English-Chinese	3	2,3%
	Chinese-Dutch	2	1,5%
	<b>Sub-total</b>	55	42,3%
<i>Multilingual</i>	Indonesian-English-Chinese	6	4,6%
	Indonesian-English-Dutch	1	0,7%
	Indonesian-Javanese-Chinese	2	1,5%
	Indonesian-Javanese-English	1	0,7%
	Indonesian-Javanese-Japanese	1	0,7%
	Indonesian-Japanese-Sundanese	1	0,7%
	Indonesian-English-Dutch-Chinese	1	0,7%
	<b>Sub-total</b>	13	10%
	<b>TOTAL</b>	130	100%

Table 1 presents that total data found in *Kya Kya* is 130 signs. The languages covered in Language Display are Indonesian, English, German, Chinese, Dutch, Javanese, Arabic, Japanese, and Sundanese language, which are divided into monolingual, bilingual, and multilingual. In Table 1, it shows that the monolingual signs have the highest frequency among bilingual and multilingual. The monolingual reigns as the dominant sign with the amount of 47,6%. The detailed monolingual distribution and information is presented in Figure 1, Figure 2, and Figure 3.

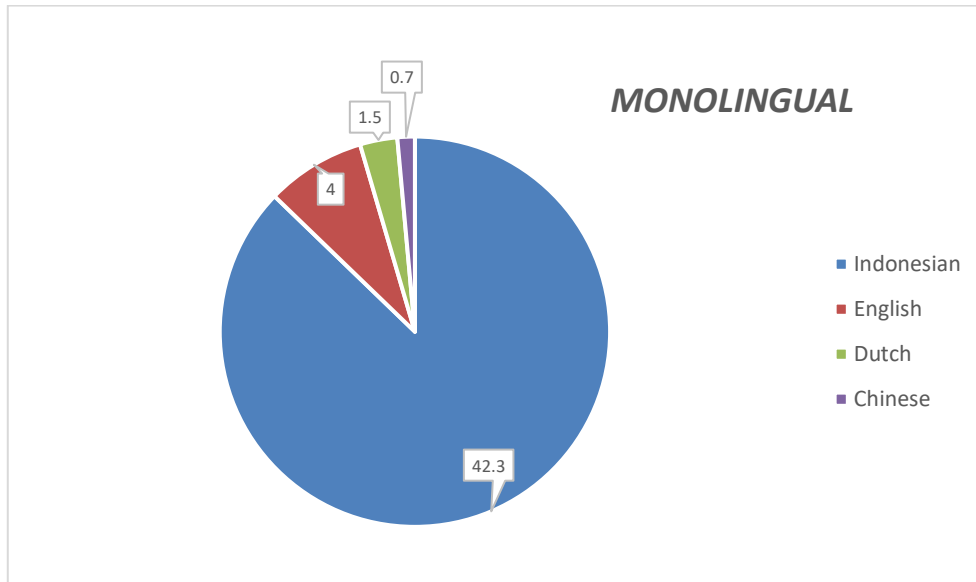


Figure 1. Monolingual Distribution of Linguistics Landscape in Kya Kya



Figure 2. *Usaha Jaya* in Monolingual Language of Indonesian



Figure 3. *Bank Indeks* in Monolingual Language of English

In Kya Kya, the amount of monolingual signs compiled are 62 signs. The chart in Figure 1 above shows that the majority language used in Kya Kya Street is Bahasa Indonesia with the amount of 42.3% (55 signs). As the national language, Indonesian plays an important role as used by businesses in Kya Kya to cater a wider audience. The dominance

of Indonesian reflects a top-down influence, as supported by Ben-Rafel et.al (2006) that top-down sign reflects a commitment to promote the dominant culture, typically represented by the local language. Indonesia has a policy that mandates the use of Indonesian in official settings. The regulation in Article 36, Paragraph 3 of the constitution of “Flags and Languages”, states that “Indonesian language is mandatory for the name of buildings or structures, roads, apartments or settlements, offices, trading complexes, trademarks, business institutions, educational institutions organizations founded or owned by Indonesian citizens or Indonesian legal entities.” This implies the government notices, streets names, and other signage within *Kya Kya* Street primarily in Indonesian. As presented in Figure 2, the shop name utilized Indonesian by naming “Usaha Jaya” which conveys a prosperous business.

Further analysis shows that the monolingual languages displayed in *Kya Kya* are English (3%), Dutch (1.5%), and followed by Chinese (0.7%). Further information, in Article 36, Paragraph 4 of the constitution of “Flags and Languages” which implies that the regulation provides space for regional language or foreign languages with the condition that it has historical, cultural, customary, or religious values. Moreover, the prominence of English as a secondary dominant of monolingual language suggests a target audience for tourists. Figure 3 portrays the use of English as in “Bank Index”. However, English is not widely used for local businesses in *Kya Kya*. Dutch, though with a smaller percentage of signs, could be a reason for Indonesia’s colonial past. Surabaya has once been the capital of Surabaya Residency under Dutch colonial rule, which suggests a stronger Dutch influence at one point. According to Handinoto (1996), the residential area is divided based on ethnicity, where the Europeans are located on the west side and the East Asian (Arab, Chinese, Malay) are located on the east side. The monolingual language usage of Dutch might be a result of this historical influence. Furthermore, Chinese followed as the least monolingual languages displayed in *Kya Kya*. This might be due to several factors where *Kya Kya* Street signs remain bilingual, as presented in the figures below.

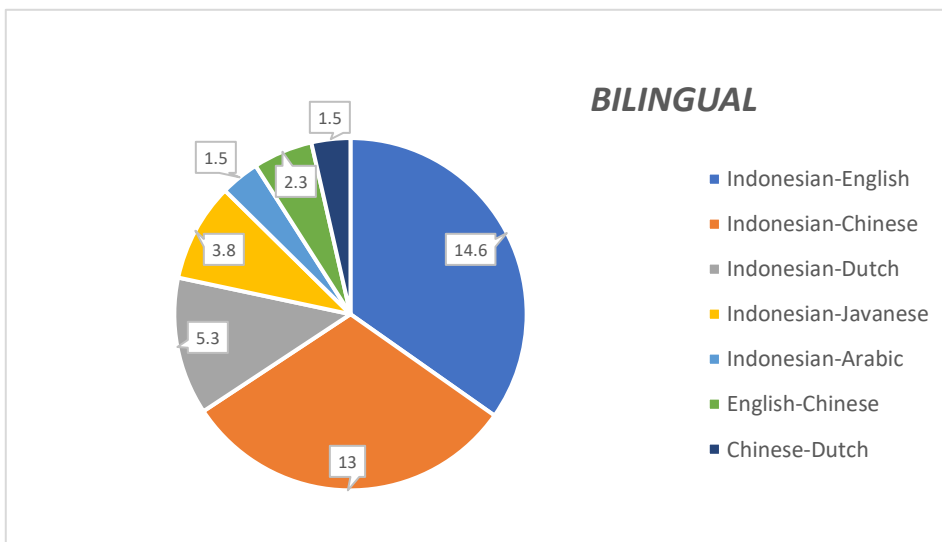


Figure 4. Bilingual Distribution of Linguistics Landscape in *Kya Kya*



Figure 5. BBX Lounge *Koperasi Primer & Meeting Point* in Bilingual Languages of Indonesian-English



**Figure 6. 施礼乐至极 Toko Sri Redjeki in Bilingual Languages of Indonesian-Chinese**

The total number of bilingual languages in *Kya Kya* is covered in 55 signs. As presented in Figure 4, it can be seen that the Indonesian-English language display in *Kya Kya* has the highest frequency rate with the amount of 14.6% (19 signs). This number reflects the position of both languages. Indonesian serves as the national language which ensures wider understanding of the readers, whereas according to Cenoz & Gorter (2009), globalization plays a key role in the spreadness of English through the lens of economics, which can be seen from the shop's name in *Kya Kya*. The example of Indonesian-English is displayed in Figure 5.

Interestingly, Indonesian-Chinese ranked as the second bilingual language in *Kya Kya* with almost similar frequency (13% followed by 17 signs). This frequency portrays the Chinese community's presence and their language needs in *Kya Kya*. Additionally, Linguistic Landscapes as a symbolic construction of the public place could reveal the social interaction or "things happen" in society (Ben-Rafael et al. 2006). Surabaya's Chinese community boasts a long history, with their presence during the colonial period around 1411 and residing in *Kalimas* River, including *Kya Kya* (Sari, Antariksa, & Kurniawan, 2011). As a consequence, they expanded their presence and resulted in the use of Chinese as a dominant language in the area. The linguistic landscape in this study portrays how Chinese language is still employed in the shop's naming in *Kya Kya*, as shown in Figure 6. In bilingual Indonesian-Chinese, most of the signs combined by Chinese lettering, for instance, 施礼乐至极 "Toko Sri Redjeki".

The next section of the analysis shows that Indonesian-Dutch comes up as the third rank of bilingual frequency with the amount of 5.3% indicating the result of colonialism in *Kya Kya*. Next, Indonesian-Javanese (3.8%) suggest a bilingual population in *Kya Kya* that includes the Javanese people. In the final part of the analysis, other bilingual combinations such as English-Chinese (2.3%), Indonesian-Arabic (1.5%), and Chinese-Dutch (1.5%) are all present but at a lower frequency. Further analysis of the data reveals the multilingualism used in linguistic landscapes of *Kya Kya* Surabaya, detailed distribution is presented above in Figure 7.

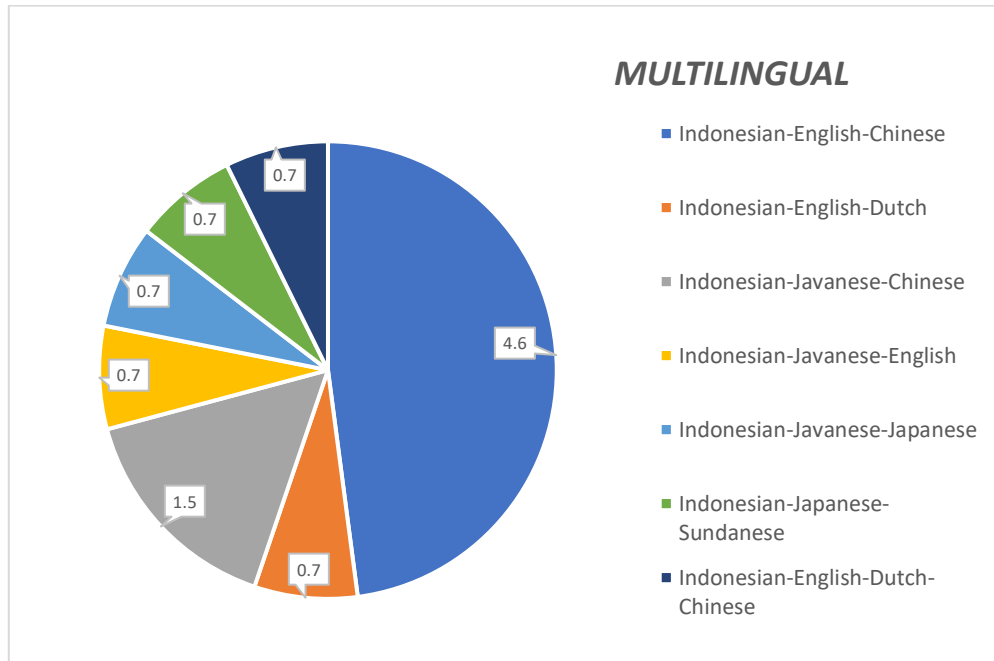


Figure 7. Multilingual Distribution of Linguistics Landscape in *Kya Kya*



Figure 8. *Sop Merah Rumahan* in Multilingual Language of Indonesian-English-Chinese

*Kya Kya*'s linguistic landscape analysis reveals a dominance of monolingual and bilingual signs, however, Figure 7 shows the presence of multilingual signs as in the language display in *Kya Kya* Surabaya. Although the total number of multilingual signs (13 signs) is less than monolingual and bilingual, it offers wider information towards the district language use. What stands out in the Figure 7 is the highest rate of multilingualism in *Kya Kya* involves a combination of Indonesian-English-Chinese language for over 4.6% with a total amount of 6 signs. It signifies the district's multicultural identity. Additionally, Barni & Bagna (2008) address that when a sign incorporates two or more languages, it signifies an intention to bridge the communication from diverse linguistic communities. This approach aims to deliver the written text in the signs and is understood by a wider range of people. For instance, Figure 8 displays a cultural diversity presented by the use of Indonesian-English-Chinese language. Indonesian is used to show the menu as in "Sop Merah and Ayam Tim Jahe" since

the readers in *Kya Kya* could understand the menu's offering. Moreover, Chinese is used to highlight the specific dishes as in "*Sionak, Chasiu, and Hiwan*" since people in the community have become familiar with the naming of the food. Lastly, English is employed as the complementary of the sign, as can be seen in "*Nasi Campur Special Box*".

Further analysis shows that there are six more multilingual signs found in *Kya Kya*. Indonesian-Javanese-Chinese language ranked as the second multilingual in the district with the amount of 1.5% (2 signs). The other multilingual signs are presented in the Figure 7 above. It is worth noting that some signs incorporate more than three languages. In this study, there was one datum that used the combination of Indonesian, English, Dutch, and Chinese as the signage. To sum up, the analysis of multilingual signs reveals a diverse range of language combinations.

Moving to the overall data interpretation, as supported by Cenoz & Gorter (2009) we can infer that government language policies typically focus on regulating the language in official signage, however, these policies could have some impact on commercial signs as well. For instance, in *Kya Kya*, the shops commonly used Indonesian language. It reflects the role of Indonesian as a fundamental language for communication within *Kya Kya*'s multicultural population. Indonesian being the dominant language in monolingual, bilingual, and multilingual implies its role as the national language and lingua franca for communication beyond the ethnicities in *Kya Kya*. These interpretations are in line with the study conducted by Safitri (2020), where Indonesian remains as the prevalent language in "Chinatown" Surabaya, where *Kya Kya* being one of the districts covered in "Chinatown"

Although *Kya Kya* is known as the outstanding Chinese ethnic, yet, Chinese is positioned as the number two language used in *Kya Kya*'s signage. A possible explanation for this might be taken from the interviewee from a Chinese association in Chinatown known as "*Hwie Tiauw Ka*". Based on the interview, Chinese language was banned in the New Order government and the use of Chinese language in public spaces was declined. As supported by Suryadinata (1986), the usage of Chinese in the New Order era was considered as inappropriate. This could shed light on despite the *Kya Kya*'s prominence in Chinese ethnic, Chinese language appears as the number two language used in linguistic landscape rather than the dominant language. Another finding is that English has a presence in *Kya Kya*'s linguistic landscape. This interpretation is in line with Schlick (2003) where he argues that signs tend to employ English as one of the languages in a multilingual setting. Similarly, the use of Dutch might have been caused by the colonial influence within *Kya Kya*'s district. Overall, these findings provide a deeper exploration of *Kya Kya*'s linguistic landscape and the reasons behind the language displayed.

#### 4. Conclusion

This study embarked on the linguistic landscape focusing in *Kya Kya Ji Kembang Jepun*, Surabaya. By analyzing the language displayed in public signs, it revealed that *Kya Kya* has a rich language diversity. Indonesian, as the national language, serves as the dominant language used in *Kya Kya*. Moreover, the following languages are English, Dutch, and Chinese. In bilingualism, which focuses on two languages, Indonesian-English has the highest rate of frequency as the most used language in *Kya Kya* due to globalization factors. For multilingual group, the combination of Indonesian-English-Chinese language is ranked as the frequent language display in *Kya Kya*, as Chinese is the dominant language after colonialism in *Kya Kya* Surabaya.

The reasons behind the language choices are in line with the cultural heritage in *Kya Kya*, where some signs use Chinese characters to mark the community. Furthermore, the influence of globalization was also undeniable, where English emerged in the *Kya Kya* area. In conclusion, *Kya Kya*'s linguistic landscape has proven to be an insightful lens to show the language displayed and the reasons behind the choice related to the identity. Additionally, future research might analyze the other sociolinguistic factors influencing the linguistic landscape, such as language attitudes of the local people. Also, a longitudinal study could help the future research to reveal the *Kya Kya*'s linguistic landscape over time.

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